CARREL LOAN
For Library Use
only!

FAITH'S

BATTLES AND VICTORIES;

OR,

Thoughts for Troublous Times.

BY

REV. JOHN S. GRASTY.

NEW YORK:
ANSON D. F. RANDOLPH & CO.,
770 BROADWAY, COR. 9TH STREET.
1870.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1869, by
ANSON D. F. RANDOLPH & Co.,
In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States for the
Southern District of New York.

THE LIBRARY
Union Theological Seminary
RICHMOND, VA.

EDWARD O. JENKINS,
PRINTER AND STEREOTYPER,
No. 20 North William St.

C
32
G7

DEDICATION.

With ever-increasing gratitude to God for the Lessons of childhood, the following pages are inscribed, in reverence and love, to the cherished memory of my sainted mother.

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

It is no singular sentiment of the writer, that in every leading event and character of the Bible, a lesson is inculcated, both specific and distinctive. In the following pages it is the purpose of the author to verify this opinion. For it is believed that in the sacrifice of Isaac, in the temptation of Job, in the persecution of Daniel, in the imprisonment of Paul and Silas, etc., etc., the Holy Spirit points a particular moral, designed to instruct and invigorate the faithful in all coming generations. Entertaining this idea, the writer has entered the Gallery of Scripture worthies, and with "such strength as he could attain to" the effort is made to remove carefully the veil of prejudice and mysticism from each successive form, and to unfold in simple and definite words, the meaning of Divine Providence, in the lineaments of every separate hero. And in this study of the Sacred Oracles it has been permitted to the author to behold, as never before, that unity in diversity that exists in the great purposes of God throughout centuries of time and in countries the most remote,

whilst the amazing superiority of Inspired Revelation, in the authority of its teachings and the wide sweep of its foresight and wisdom, is matter for ennobling thought and strong consolation. Man's devices are for a day, but the "Word of the Lord it endureth forever."

But in the interpretation of Scripture no grace is more needed than unaffected humility. For the mind of the Spirit should be faithfully studied, and all idle speculations and fanciful theories must be quickly and sternly rejected. Though a "house full of silver and gold" be the reward, the conscientious teacher "should not go beyond the Word of the Lord to do less or more."

If the present volume shall comfort the feeble-minded and support the weak; if the slothful are quickened to diligence and the doubting encouraged to believe; if, above all, this offering of the servant shall be accepted by the Master, the Author's joy will be large, and his gratitude unfeigned.

SHELBYVILLE, KY., *September*, 1869.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PROVIDENCE 9

CHAPTER II.

ABRAHAM, THE FAITHFUL 16

CHAPTER III.

LOT, THE TEMPORIZER 30

CHAPTER IV.

JACOB, THE BEREAVED 44

CHAPTER V.

JOB, THE MAN OF PRINCIPLE 58

CHAPTER VI.

BALAAM, THE MISER 79

CHAPTER VII.

MOSES, THE INCORRUPTIBLE 94

CHAPTER VIII.

MORDECAI AND ESTHER; OR, WAITING AND WATCHING 107

CHAPTER IX.

SAMSON, THE AVENGER 142

CHAPTER X.

THE HEBREW CONFESSORS 170

CHAPTER XI.

NEHEMIAH, THE CHRISTIAN PATRIOT AND EARNEST WORKER..... 192

CHAPTER XII.

PAUL AND SILAS, THE PRISONERS 214

CHAPTER XIII.

STEPHEN, THE MARTYR 221

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SWORD *VERSUS* THE TRUTH 227

CHAPTER XV.

GOD IN HISTORY..... 237

CHAPTER XVI.

LOT'S WIFE, THE LINGERER..... 256

CHAPTER XVII.

LEAVING THE WILDERNESS..... 279

FAITH'S BATTLES AND VICTORIES.

CHAPTER I.

PROVIDENCE.

"LET the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; and let men say among the nations, The Lord reigneth."—1 CHRON. xvi. 31.

UNDER the teachings of Atheism history is a riddle. For according to this view all events, great and small, fall out in inexplicable confusion. And is it not mournfully significant when the perplexed and sorrowful heart labors with diligence to eliminate Authority and exclude Divine Succor from a world that is burdened by vexation and wrong. That we meet with difficulties, in every field of thought and action, cannot be denied, but does it lighten the load of Adam's suffering

sons to be complacently told that there is a philosophy in these things, and that "second causes" combine beautifully even where pain and death are the melancholy results.

But whilst multitudes of the human race do not like to retain God in their knowledge, still now, as of old, there are a few earnest souls, "a remnant according to the election of grace," who honestly inquire after truth. To this "chosen generation" the writer would kindly and respectfully offer a few words of consolation and cheer. For, blessed be God, there is no cloud without its "bright light," if the soul in temptation and trial will only patiently look and submissively wait.

"By prayer let him wrestle and God will perform,
With Christ in the vessel he can smile at the storm."

The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. There can be no higher aim than this. For by HIM were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities or pow-

ers; all things were created by Him and for Him and He is before all things and by Him all things consist. We live too in a world that was set apart from of old, as the arena upon which should be manifested in a special manner the attribute of Divine Mercy in the redemption of a people. In the accomplishment of this purpose all history is subordinate. For that the Church, the centuries through, has been the central idea of the Divine mind, no diligent student of the past will fail to discover. So far is it from being admissible that the theories of Positivism and the doctrines "of second causes" contain the whole truth, nothing appears plainer to the devout and candid mind than that the Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose and govern all creatures, actions and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence. We admit, indeed, that no violence is offered to the will of the creature, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established. But to deny a Providence over this world is

infidelity in its gloomiest and most desolate form. For, a nation deserted by king, a family forsaken by head and father, are feeble types of a world from which the great Creator has withdrawn His presence and care. But if a Providence be admitted at all, shall it not embody all events, from a falling sparrow to a crumbling throne? No event stands isolated. Every transaction is indissolubly related to some other, and the very smallest event is only comparatively unimportant. For what reflecting mind can fail to recall the influence which apparently trivial circumstances have exercised over all subsequent life? It has sometimes turned out that the choice of a right or left hand path, chosen indifferently at the time, led to the breaking up of old habits and changed the whole current of individual history. If there be, therefore, a Providence at all, it must of necessity extend, permissively or actively, to every event. This much was claimed for the Almighty centuries ago. "I form the light and create darkness. I make peace, I send war! Shall there be evil in the city and the

Lord hath not done it?" The doctrine of divine Providence, however, is often misrepresented. Faith and trust are exchanged for prediction, and in the presumptuous effort to fathom the unrevealed, Jehovah is made altogether like unto ourselves. A priori reasoning about God's movements in the future is always hazardous and sometimes wicked. God's ways are in the sea, His paths in the great waters, and His footsteps are not known. When the disciple becomes prophet, and the prediction fails of fulfillment, then the truth lies wounded in the house of her friends. Secret things are the Lord's; revealed things alone belong unto us and to our children. In the study of God's word and providence, nothing therefore more becomes the student than the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. He who judges the Almighty by feeble sense "is sure to err." For there are mines of "unfathomable skill" into which it is sheer presumption for mortal eyes to pry. In regard to many events yet future, the pious soul must be content to be patient and wait. God reigns. Clouds and

darkness may surround Him, but righteousness and justice are the habitations of His throne. In the end, beyond a doubt, all shall be well to the faithful. The journey here and there, and all the way through, may be dark, but at "evening time there shall be light"—that God who numbers the hairs of our head, hears the young raven when it cries, and without whose knowledge not even a sparrow falls to the ground, will order everything wisely and well. But while the future has its clouds, and the great purposes of Jehovah, in their fulness and perfection, are concealed for the present from human view, yet, thanks be unto God, the past is full of light. It is here that we are encompassed by a great cloud of witnesses. So complete too is this testimony, that there is scarcely a strait in which the pious soul of any generation can be placed, that a recorded example is not ready to enlighten and console. And if there be apparent contradictions of providential dealing with the believer or his house, let it never be forgotten, that it has been God's plan from of old, "to

lead the blind by a way they knew not, and paths they had not known," reserving it as a divine prerogative to make darkness light, and crooked things straight. Saints of all ages enter heaven through tribulation. And yet as we look backward, never has an affliction overtaken a member of the little flock without merciful design. The trial of faith in every instance is precious. The cloud, the rod and the furnace are God's instruments to transform the servant into the image of his Master. He who would be like Christ must not refuse, when occasion demands, to tread the wine-press of suffering.

CHAPTER II.

ABRAHAM, THE FAITHFUL.

"He that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."
—Jesus Christ.

ABRAHAM was the friend of God. The Almighty selected him from the thousands of his kindred. Consider the promises that were made, and what covenants were entered into. "Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." And again, after Abram and Lot returned out

of Egypt, and there was a disagreement between their herdmen, so that a separation took place between the nephew and uncle. The Lord said unto Abram after that Lot was parted from him: "Lift up now thine eyes and look from the place where thou art, northward and southward and eastward and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land, in the length of it, and in the breadth of it: for I will give it unto thee."

And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to him once more, and said unto him: "I am the Almighty God, walk before me and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly." And God talked with him, saying: "As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. And I will

make thee exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram; but thy name shall be Abraham: for a father of many nations have I made thee." "And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai, thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations, kings of people shall be of her." "And God said, Sarah, thy wife, shall bear thee a son indeed, and thou shalt call his name Isaac: And I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant and with his seed after him." And the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as He had spoken.

For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.

Up to this period, all went well. The lad grew and was the comfort of aged parents. But bye and bye, a dark day begins to dawn. It is true that Abraham, hitherto, had not been entirely exempted from trials, but now his heart is to be pierced by a two-edged sword. Isaac, as Josephus informs us, at this period had reached his twenty-fifth year. He is a youth of singular accomplishments both as to body and mind. "And it came to pass, after these things that God did tempt Abraham and said unto him, Abraham, and he said, Behold here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." The command was positive and without explanation. It was given, too, in a form well calculated to move a parent's deepest sensibilities. "Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou

lovest," etc., etc. "And Abraham rose up early in the morning and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac, his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up and went unto the place of which God had told him."

Now, if philosophy and human reason, alone, had influenced the mind of the Patriarch, we should be at no loss to conjecture a few of his thoughts on this melancholy journey.

1. The command to offer Isaac appears to be in palpable violation of covenants. In this son, Jehovah promises again and again that all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. The engagement is direct and positive that Isaac shall live, and out of his loins proceed a numerous and blessed progeny. But now I am commanded to offer him as a burnt offering. Does not the Judge of all the earth speak truth? Is it possible for God to contradict himself?

2. In the second place, there is something that seems so unfatherly and cruel in the very terms of the command—"Take, now, thy son,

thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest." The voice that directs me to Mount Moriah appears to delight in breaking up the great deep of parental sensibility and sorrow. Can this be the command of that merciful God who pities His saints like as an earthly father pities his children?

3. In the third place, not a word of explanation has been given. Here, then, is the arbitrary order to sacrifice an only son; and He who commands does not deign to offer a syllable of comfort or a sentence of apology. But, before a father's hand is lifted against his own offspring, is it not just and fair that a reason of no questionable character shall be given? And yet the voice that speaks to me, only says, "Take, now, thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains I will tell thee of."

4. Nor were the personal feelings of Abraham the only consideration involved. About this tragical business must not Isaac himself

be consulted? Shall the hopes and joys and light of life's early morning be rudely quenched, and that, too, by the hand of a loving father, without enquiry and without explanation?

5. Where is the necessity of this heartrending transaction? What possible benefit can accrue? And, on the other hand, will not the heathen mock; and shall not this event be a striking and standing memorial to the scoffing nations round about of the unfaithfulness of Jehovah to His vows? But Abraham rose up early in the morning and obeyed.

Abraham is called the father of the faithful and the friend of God. How honorable the relation, how remarkable the title! Abraham believed, but so did others; in what, therefore, consists the superiority of the Patriarch's faith? This information is carefully furnished; for says the Apostle, "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called; accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from

the dead; from whence, also, he received him in a figure." The doctrine of the resurrection has staggered the speculative mind in every age of the world. To the question, If a man die, shall he live again? unenlightened reason has ever answered with a doubt. To the testimony of Revelation, philosophy opposes objections. How can this identical body be raised? Dust returns to dust, and the elements of one corporeal system are speedily absorbed by another, and this process is repeated from century to century, until the component parts of my own physical nature may have constituted an ingredient in organisms innumerable. How, then, is it possible for the Almighty to gather up these scattered particles, and reconstruct the very body that was buried? With men this is impossible. There was no encouragement to faith in the suggestions of reason or in bygone examples. On the one side was human experience, instinctive affection and apparent impossibility, while on the other, there stood alone the simple command and promise of God. Slay this child,

and let his body be burned to ashes, and I can raise him again from the dead; raise him up as he was—Isaac, thine only son, Isaac whom thou lovest. Reason cannot conjecture the mode, but faith reverently obeys. The very magnitude of the difficulty to be surmounted only served to illustrate more conspicuously the virtue of the act. And Abraham said unto his young men, abide ye here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder and worship and come again to you. Abraham believed God, and the willingness to sacrifice Isaac was a practical demonstration of the faith that was in him. Nor was it simply as an actor that the Patriarch stretched forth his hand and took the knife to slay his son. He believed that Isaac must be sacrificed, but he believed also that God was able to raise him again from the dead. Is it not wonderful, indeed, that a doctrine so difficult to reason, under conditions the most grievous, should have been implicitly accepted. The man who, in a generation like that, with obstacles so great, could offer a sacrifice the most costly, with no sanction or

security but the simple word of Jehovah, is entitled by preëminence to be called "the father of the faithful," and the "friend of God."

And was it not here that Abraham saw Christ's day and rejoiced? For the transaction on Mount Moriah was typical; and since Abraham does not withhold his only son, may we not well suppose that God did not conceal from His "friend" in this hour of distinguished trust and obedience, a foresight of that greater sacrifice when a mightier Father should offer up His only-begotten Son, not in a figure simply, but literally and really; and when He who bore our sins and carried our griefs could find no victim near the altar prepared as a substitute, although in agony He exclaims, "If it be possible let this cup pass from me!"

Abraham was, no doubt, sorely tried; for no affliction "for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous." The way of the Eternal was dark. But let it never be forgotten that no man liveth to himself. The tribulations which come upon the saint are designed

not simply for the good of those who are afflicted, but the trial of our faith is oftentimes to the end that others shall see "the bright light in the cloud" and take courage. Abraham was a representative man. What he spake and did was to be the property of no one nation or generation. The ages to come were to feel the influence and power of his example. Besides this, in the family of Abraham, the Almighty, now for the first time, organizes visibly His Church. An agreement the most solemn, indeed, had already been entered into, and at the very threshold it was important in the highest degree that the integrity and devotion of faith should be tried to the utmost. Supreme love to God is the sentiment that must underlie church connections and all true discipleship. "He that loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." "He that hates not his own life cannot be my disciple." Now, are not these sayings hard and impossible? Can a parent love God better than his child? The Church of God is but just now organized, and this is the

moment to settle practically the injunction of the First Commandment. It is true that no greater battle could have been offered to faith. Three days were afforded for calm and sober deliberation, while the lovely victim all the while stood at the father's side. If Abraham triumphs, then the principle is settled for all time, that the relation of believer and Redeemer is purer and deeper than any connection whatever that can possibly exist in the families of earth. When, therefore, the patriarch on Mount Moriah lifted up his hand to slay Isaac, he established a precedent of *obedience* for believers of all generations; whilst the superiority of faith, to every instinctive emotion, was most gloriously illustrated. For if revelation is clearly established from without, then the voice of reason from within must ever afterwards be subordinate. For, if the judge of all the earth does right, how can the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Since the moment that Abraham descended from the mount, the believer of every generation has been able to

read, in no uncertain lines, two great fundamental lessons:

1. In every occupation, possession, interest, friendship or relation of this world, the love of Christ must distance all competition.

2. Faithful obedience is the law of God's house. The way may be dark, but if the commandment is clear, the soul must go forward. The excellence of Abraham's faith was demonstrated not wholly, nor perhaps even mainly, by his willingness to offer up Isaac, nor by the evident sincerity with which he stretched forth his hand to slay the son whom he loved; but the virtue of his conduct consists chiefly in this, that rejecting the pleadings of sense, and turning a deaf ear to the cavils of reason, he believed an apparent impossibility, and without ostensible proof, accepted the doctrine of the resurrection upon the unsupported assertion of Jehovah. Isaac might perish, but Abraham accounted that God was able to raise him from the dead. The testimony of the Creator was estimated more highly than the jargon of schools and

all the "oppositions of science, falsely so called." This exhibition, therefore, of the Patriarch's faith is a lesson to the ages to teach them the necessity and value of obedience and trust. For however difficult the task, and however repulsive and painful the duty, the heart must not despair or draw back when the voice of the Master is heard distinctly proclaiming, "This is the way, walk ye in it." Abraham believed. There were no precedents in the past, no visible encouragements in the present; faith had one ground, and only one, upon which to rest, and that was the simple pledge and covenant of God The thing promised seemed marvellous, and to human reason unattainable, and yet Abraham believed and obeyed. Such, reader, is an example of scriptural faith held up for our imitation. "The blind may be brought by a way that they knew not, and led in paths they have not known;" but to refuse to follow is "iniquity and idolatry," for to "obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."

CHAPTER III.

LOT, THE TEMPORIZER.

"THEY that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts. . . . . For the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."—1 TIM. vi. 9, 10.

THERE are some believers in this fallen world whose pathway, for the most part, seems to be thorny and troubled. Peace never, in such cases, flows like a river. Peculiarity of disposition, family mismanagement or some unmortified lust, keeps a perpetual irritation. It matters not how great and diversified are the blessings of Providence, nor how long the exemption from bodily pain and grievous afflictions, there is ever "a dead fly in the ointment." The minds of such persons appear to live in the past or the future, and the moments, as they

pass, are full of perplexity and vexation. Alas! for the disciple when "the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches and the lust of other things" are allowed to enter in and "choke the word, so that it becometh unfruitful." Lot was a righteous man, but there never seemed to be much sunshine in his dwelling. Early in his history there arose a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle. The ties between the nephew and uncle were severed, and one took to the right hand and the other to the left. Lot pitched his tent toward Sodom, and gradually made his way into the city itself. It was here that he vexed his righteous soul, from day to day, with the unlawful deeds and filthy conversation of the wicked. While there he never had a comfortable moment, and at last God fired the town over his head and forced him to the mountain for safety. Nor was this all; his company, as he left the city, was small, and, alas! even one of this number is destroyed. The wife of his bosom, the mother of his children, instead of

sharing in the joy of their deliverance, provoked God by disobedience, and remained a monument of His vengeance. Lot loses wife, allies and substance, and is forced to betake himself to an uncomfortable solitude. And even here he is tempted and overcome. For drunkenness and incest overtake him, and his own daughters are the betrayers. This is a dark picture in the life of a believer. And yet the ways of Providence can be vindicated in it all. Lot reaped the fruit of his own sinful choice. It is true that the human mind has ever been prone to charge God with its distresses. But it will appear in the sequel that a larger portion of the troubles which afflict mankind is the result of violated law. The creature, whoever he be, is in the practice of cherished iniquity, and thereby provokes that divine discipline so necessary for correction. And to this it may be added, that sin has a sting of its own; so that, when a man settles in Sodom, he cannot blame God for vexations. For if all-sufficient grace is promised to them that ask, then he who pines

and frets and croaks can count it as a certainty that the source of discontent is not to be found in unprovided mercies, but its origin must be sought in unmortified tempers and a neglected mercy-seat. "Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god." When Abram and Lot separated, the prospects and position of the two men appeared to be equal. But the gulf at once began to widen, until their destinies, individual and domestic, were as wide as the poles. Nor is this diversity of condition to be explained by the doctrine of haphazard or inevitable decree. "God in no sense is the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of His creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away." In the afflictions which overtook Lot there is no ground for a charge against the Almighty; not the Creator but the creature himself is to blame; for

1. When there arose a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle, Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan, because it was well watered, even as

the garden of the Lord. Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom. But the men of Sodom were wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly. Lot, though a Christian man, was influenced by improper motives. In a matter of infinite importance, the decision of the mind seems to be based wholly upon worldly considerations. Abram offers a choice of the country, and Lot accepts it without even a word of thankful acknowledgment. His conduct, as it appears to us, was selfish and ungrateful. Lot gives vent to no feeling of regret even in his separation from Abram. His affections were absorbed by the well-watered and fertile land, and he makes haste to occupy it. It is true that the inhabitants of Sodom were sinners of the first magnitude — sinners before the Lord; impudent, heaven-daring sinners; sinners even to a proverb;* but these considerations were altogether insufficient to deter, when the eye was riveted upon the prospect of gain. The love

* Bush.

of money, therefore, was at the bottom of this choice. Self and lust, rather than principle, gained the mastery.

There is a period in the life of almost every man when the fortunes of the entire future appear to be suspended upon the decisions of a single hour; and it is in this crisis that the soul should act with courageous honesty, regardless of consequences. For if we can only act the heroic for once, and at the right moment, the deepest gulf of human existence is spanned and overpassed. It was at this point that Lot came short. The highest motive by which he was influenced in his separation from Abram had the appearance of being "earthy." And those who choose relations, callings, dwellings or settlements, with respect to fleshly gratifications, and not with a view to the soul and its higher necessities, cannot expect God's presence nor blessing, "but are commonly disappointed in what they principally aim at, and miss of that in which they promise themselves satisfaction. In all our choices this principle should over-

rule us—that which is best for our souls is best for us." We are to avoid with unceasing vigilance every occupation, every intimacy, every neighborhood which unavoidably retards our progress toward heaven; for one false step invariably leads to another until the individual becomes involved in meshes of difficulty from which honorable escape is almost impossible.

2. If we look a little farther into the sources of Lot's misfortunes, he might be found selecting a wife without due consideration to her religious qualifications. She may have been fair and beautiful and rich, but the solemn question should have been asked, Does she fear God and keep His commandments? For how can two walk together except they be agreed; and if a man's wife is ever urging him forward after wealth and place, how steadfast must be the husband if he does not fall into temptation and a snare. Lot's wife very probably was gay, frivolous and vain, and a home in the city gave opportunity for the exhibition of these qualities. Be this as

it may, Lot's wife once within the limits of Sodom could scarcely be warned, even by an angel's voice, to leave it; and even when escaped from its confines, looked back disobediently and perished.

We approach the climax of misfortune step by step. No man becomes wholly abandoned in a day. There is first the blade, then the ear, and after that the full corn in the ear. Profligacy has its beginning. The gambler threw his first card; the drunkard took his first drink; the swearer swore his first oath; the perjurer uttered his first prevarication, and the path of murderers and robbers had its origin in petty purloinings and in the indulgence of anger. And if we go down a little deeper it shall be discerned that the lustful eye and those inward conflicts with temptation went on for many days before an overt act appeared. The combat was fierce, but the enemy conquered; and the soul overborne and degraded goes on its dread way of falsehood and crime. Lot at the first only pitched his tent toward Sodom. He may have de-

signed to keep a safe distance from the scene of actual abomination; but with a worldly-minded wife at his side, and the love of gain in his heart—having once come within the perilous vicinity—he is imperceptibly drawn forward. Sô treacherous is fallen nature in its weakness, that having once been persuaded to tread the borders of forbidden ground, it is easily induced to proceed a little farther, to take one more step, till at length every restraint is broken through and we are borne forward into the very vortex of sin.* The soul first "walks in the counsel of the ungodly, then stands in the way of sinners, and finally sits down in the seat of the scornful." The tendency of sin is ever downward, and the most favorable time for attack is when vice and temptation first show their front. If this golden opportunity is suffered to pass the forces are scattered, and, hour by hour, the probabilities of success become fewer and fewer.

Let the young man look well especially to

* Bush.

his matrimonial alliance. The unhappy union of the Christian with an unbeliever has proved the source of innumerable evils. The grand motive before the eye, first of all, should be the moral fitness. Many turn aside in the hope that position shall be gained by certain family connections. But the individual who is decided by such a consideration as this will oftentimes have occasion to repent in bitterness and sorrow. For the wife and mother of a household exerts an influence for evil or good that cannot be well overestimated; and it is a sad mistake wherever the pious soul has been captivated and led astray by the glare and tinsel of this sinful world, and also a melancholy forfeiture of self-respect, not to say downright disloyalty to the Master, whenever a child of God subordinates the attitude of a Christian to any earthly position whatever. The world has its nobles and its wealth kings; but the truest aristocracy, after all, are those sons and daughters of the Almighty who have been redeemed with an incorruptible price.

Lot, let it be repeated, was never happy in Sodom. Between himself and his companions there was no congeniality. Instead of the company of Abraham, his society was confined to unbelievers, and his soul is vexed with the sight of wicked deeds; and instead of the ease and pleasure which he anticipated, a company of plunderers took Lot and his goods and departed. The unhappy man now begins to realize the bitter consequences of taking up his abode in the midst of God-defying habitations. That wealth which was the cause of his former quarrels, is made a prey to merciless heathens; that place which his eye covetously chose, betrays his life and goods.* Our sins will find us out.

A Bible Christian is the highest style of man, and the soul that "does justly, loves mercy and walks humbly with God" can never suffer essentially from either persecution, afflictions or self-denial. Selfishness and uninterrupted ease are the believer's worst enemies. Choose first the good part, and all else needful shall

* Bush.

be added. "And God said to Solomon, because this was in thine heart, and thou hast not asked riches, wealth or honor, nor the life of thine enemies, neither yet hast asked long life, but hast asked wisdom and knowledge for thyself, that thou mayest judge my people, over whom I have made thee king, wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee; and I will give thee riches and wealth and honor, such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall any after thee have the like." Abraham yielded to the noble impulses of grace and gave Lot choice of the land, but did courtesy and self-denial entail any losses in the end? It is true that Lot caught at the offer with selfish eagerness, but the destruction of property, the compromise of character, unceasing vexations and fatal visitations in the family, this was the agonizing, though legitimate, harvest of time-serving and mercenary sowing.

Abraham, on the other hand, was just, charitable and God-fearing. Duty was the highest law. And now let the current of these men's

lives be followed down to the close, and the reader shall decide.

And the history of this man Lot was written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the world have come. We learn something of the dangers as well as the advantages of wealth. How many contentions among servants, how many divisions in the family; what a source of vexation to the parent, what a means of destruction to the children has the possession of wealth often proved to have been in this fallen and self-seeking world?

How fearful the responsibility which falls upon that parent who, for the sake of "mammon" not only goes into the highways of pollution himself, but carries at his side a household of tender and inexperienced ones, to be buffeted, and it may be, destroyed by temptation. Lot tried it, but how terrible the punishment! His own life was encompassed by vexations, and the Moabites are his wicked descendants.

In all our ways, but especially in our first ways, we should acknowledge God. One sin-

gle false step in the beginning, and retrieval may be impossible. Lot at first only pitched his tent toward Sodom, but as with blinded eye he had allowed the tempter to gain one signal victory, the now unsuspecting and unfortified soul "hasteth to the snare and knoweth not that it is for its life."*

* In the preparation of the foregoing chapter, the writer acknowledges his indebtedness to "Notes on Genesis," by Dr. Bush.

CHAPTER IV.

JACOB, THE BEREAVED.

"But it shall come to pass, that at evening-time it shall be light."
—Zech. xiv. 7.

THERE are periods when to the believer's mind "clouds and darkness are the habitations of God's throne." The joy of the Lord departs, and in the place of former comfort, "waves and billows" go over the soul. The heart is sore pressed and perplexed, while the change is often sudden and unaccountable. Yesterday and the day before, and months past, were so pleasant, and now in a moment the cherished plans of years are blasted. The future rolls up dark and portentous. At such a time the question is mournfully asked, Why am I afflicted? What act in my life has brought down all this tribulation? And it is

this mystery of sorrow that gives to affliction its penetrating edge. But let it be remembered that the most favored sons of men are liable to disappointment. We are all pilgrims and sojourners, and evil days must come. Friendships are sundered, family circles break up, and deferred hope often makes the heart sick. Against these seasons there is but one antidote, the precious grace of God. For it is a part of the divine arrangement, that through great tribulation we are to enter the kingdom. Not exemption from trial, but strength to bear it has been promised. He who covenants with Jehovah, agrees to walk the whole path, whether there be darkness or light, rough places or smooth. And hence the complaint of Jacob is unjustifiable. He was indeed bereaved, "but all these things were not against him."

The sons of Jacob returned from Egypt and left Simeon behind. A demand was then made for Benjamin, whilst long ago Joseph had been taken. The patriarch was gloomy and discouraged. He no doubt brooded, as the soul

on such occasions is prone to do, over the past. One sorrow suggests another, and trial after trial is recalled. The mind, it may be, reverted to the hour when exile from the parental roof became a necessity, and when tie after tie in the native land was painfully severed. He remembered, no doubt, the treachery of Laban in the matter of Rachel and Leah, He recalls too, beyond a question, with lively sensibility, the image of that beloved wife who fell by the way, and whose bones lay buried at Ephrath, which is Bethlehem. And then with overwhelming grief the story of that cruel death that overtook the son of his first love, the report of which was borne to his ear so minutely by the guilty brothers. "Yes," could Jacob say, "I was banished from my father's house, forbidden peremptorily the sight of a doting mother, treated as an outlaw by a twin brother, deprived in the very midst of strong manhood of a confiding, loved, and trusted wife, and as though these things were not enough, other afflictions are to be added." It is now that Jacob exclaims, "Me have ye bereaved

of my children, Joseph is not and Simeon is not and ye will take Benjamin away; all these things are against me."

But Jacob's words were hasty. His heart was not brave and trustful, as it should have been; but timid and vacillating. No true child of God has a right to say that providential dealings are against him. Dark may be the way of the Eternal as mirrored in this world, but to the believer the promise stands always sure, "I will never leave nor forsake thee." It is true that there are moments when even the stoutest soul, for a while, is bewildered, but if we are only steadfast and patiently wait, the pillar of the Lord shall in due season descend and stand at the door of the tabernacle. In Jacob's case, and the case of believers generally, murmuring and unbelief cannot be excused upon the ground that the present is clouded and dark. It is true that in the infancy of faith, outward symbols and visible testimony seem to be necessary. The brazen serpent, manna about the camp, with other apparent and tangible tokens, were adapted to

the faith of beginners. But the redeemed soul must go on unto perfection. David said, when his child was taken, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth because thou didst it." Said Job, "Though he slay me yet will I trust in him." God educates His people, and never allots burdens which they are unable to bear; and if knowledge and experience are properly treasured there will ever be in store a rich provision against the bitterest day of trial. For He who gave water from the rock can provide bread in the wilderness.

It was here that Jacob was at fault. For in the very night when he went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran, in the very first night of his exile from a mother's embrace, "he dreamed, and behold, a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven, and lo! the angels of God ascended and descended." The earth side was dark, and cold, and hard; but above him was a better country; and the inhabitants of that land came to Jacob in his exile upon ministries of mercy. The weary pilgrim can well afford to

pillow his head on a stone, when in the deep visions of the night he sees the open windows of heaven, and hears the voice of the Almighty saying, "I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest."

Jacob had no ground for complaint. Neither has any other Christian man, however sore may be his distresses. For let it be observed that, whenever the believer is overtaken by disappointment and adversity, the mind should not be exercised solely about trial, but the sins of unfaithful omission, and the still greater offence of positive rebellion, should be carefully considered and penitently acknowledged. For dreadful in the eye of infinite purity must be the iniquities of the very purest of saints, and how wonderful, after all, are the compas sions of Jehovah toward the offending and guilty. It is true that Jacob was treated unkindly by Laban, his father-in-law, but persecution only occasioned prosperity, and the Patriarch came out a wealthy man from Haran. Nor are we to be surprised that Jacob, on his way, was greatly afraid and distressed when

the messenger returned, saying, "We came to thy brother Esau, and he cometh to meet thee with four hundred men." His conduct toward this brother had been inexcusable and wicked. For, in years gone by, when Esau returned from the field ahungered, and faint under the gnawings of appetite, Jacob purchased his birthright. And afterward, when Isaac was old, and feeble, and blind, those bodily infirmities which should have excited solicitude and care, were made the vehicle through which a father was deceived and a brother supplanted. From every possible view the conduct of Jacob was unwarranted and sinful. For under no pretext whatever is it lawful for the creature to accelerate unfairly the purposes of God. Let the soul do its duty, and Jehovah will hasten the reward in "His time." The birthright was sure. Jacob had been divinely chosen, and no preference of Isaac, and no combinations of men could have altered the decree. But, notwithstanding this, there was a want of magnanimity in mother and son that surprises and shocks. It is true that Rebecca

conceives the plan, but her favorite child is not slow to execute. The conduct of both parties was graceless toward Esau, irreverent toward Isaac, and undutiful to God. If, therefore, exile and discipline overtook Jacob, the penalty was well merited. For while he recounted the past, it could be plainly discovered, that one false step in the beginning opened the way for another, so that the trials and burdens which befell him on life's journey were the inseparable consequence of his own sinful actions. But how merciful, after all, are God's ways toward His people. For in the very hour when we anticipate judgment and ruin, this is the moment of our greatest deliverance. Peter, after his denial, and David, in his blood-guiltiness, are illustrious examples. But the cases are innumerable. Let the reader refer to the first chapter of Isaiah for a remarkable record of God's clemency toward a backslidden and stiff-necked nation. The tribes are arraigned and accused. They had rebelled and brought vain oblations. The whole head was sick and the whole heart faint.

From the sole of the foot even unto the head there was no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrifying sores. The moment is critical, and condign punishment is anticipated. But in this very hour of expected wrath and destruction, when the conscience of the people is stricken, and when the Almighty is supposed to be angry and implacable, listen to the decision of the Judge, "Come, now, and hear your judgment, though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow, though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient ye shall eat the good of the land."* And how striking, again, were the divine mercy and interposition, when Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed as the messengers returned, saying, "We came to thy brother Esau, and he cometh to meet thee with four hundred men." Deliverance seemed impossible, but a way of escape was provided. Jacob was not alone, "For there wrestled an angel with him till the breaking

* רכח, translated *reason* means to *judge*, to pass sentence, to correct by punishment.

of the day; and the man said unto him, what is thy name, and he said Jacob, and the man said thy name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for as a prince hast thou power with God and with man, and hast prevailed." After this interview, Jehovah goes before Jacob, and changes the heart of Esau; and when the brothers presently meet, instead of violence and bloodshed, Esau ran and embraced Jacob, and fell on his neck and kissed him and wept. It is true that Rachel died by the way, and Joseph had disappeared; but again and again had the Almighty blessed His servant, and made promise of a nation and a company of nations and kings that should come out of his loins. Trials sharp and strong may be expected in the race of every believer, but it is a truth, nevertheless, that goodness and mercy preponderate. There are moments, too, in the life of the earnest Christian soul, when the heart leaps up and acknowledges the compassion of a Father even in the bitterest affliction. So it must have been with Jacob, when God spoke to him and

said, "I am God, the God of thy father, fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation." And how penitent and humbly grateful must Jacob have been, when he drew near to Goshen, to find Joseph, his own, long lost Joseph, Rachel's son, ready to meet Israel, his father, with a tenderness and affection that brought back vivid memories of that dear mother that was gone. For Joseph presented himself unto his father, and he fell on his neck and wept a good while. And Israel said unto Joseph, "Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive."

Jacob lived for seventeen years in the land of Egypt, and about him were all his children. And, finally, when death does approach, the Patriarch called unto his sons, and said, "Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days." And when Jacob made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and was gathered unto his people." And even in the very matter of

burial, God favored his servant. For the bones of Jacob were carried up by loving hands and buried beside the bones of his fathers, in the good land of promise.

And what lessons are we of these generations to learn from the history of Jacob? for this Patriarch, too, was a representative man, and God speaks to the Church of all ages through these providential dealings with Israel. In the case of Abraham active obedience is inculcated, but in the instance now under consideration the lesson is submission; the duty of patience and trust, when "God's ways are in the sea, and his path in the great waters." The perplexed and bewildered soul is ever pointed to the history of Jacob. There all seemed impossible, but "the blind were led by ways they knew not, and in paths they had not known, till darkness was made light and crooked things straight." He that waits patiently upon the Lord shall not be disappointed. All things work together for good to them that love God. But the believer must ever bear in mind that God's ways are

not as our ways. Israel was sent into Egypt as the best means of leading his posterity to Canaan. God banished Moses forty years into obscurity to prepare him for renown. The Israelites were led by a forty years' journey into the land of promise. And when iniquity abounded, and there seemed to be the greatest possible need of a prophet, Elijah was called away into the wilderness. If human wisdom alone had been consulted, what living man would have exiled Paul to Arabia, when there existed such earnest necessity for an apostle of his spirit in the Church at Jerusalem. How little, at the time, did the disciples themselves understand about the buffetings and crucifixion of Jesus. And yet in all these things God's wisdom has long ago been vindicated. These events were given for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the world have come. Where we cannot see, we must believe. As Abraham honored God by active obedience, so Jacob should have walked worthy of his calling by patient endurance. The father of the faithful looked back at past mercies

and believed. And there is enough of providential light in the past of every believer to inspire silence and trust, even in the gloomiest days, if he will only diligently and submissively wait and consider. If the morning is dark, if at noonday there are clouds, let him only be patient, and "at evening there shall be light."

CHAPTER V.

JOB, THE MAN OF PRINCIPLE.

"THAT the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."—1 PET. i. 7.

"But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able: but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."—1 COR. x. 13.

"THERE was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God and eschewed evil. And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters. His substance also was seven thousand sheep and three thousand camels and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she-asses and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the East. . . . . Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan

came also among them. And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil. Then Satan answered the Lord and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him and about his house and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold all that he hath is in thy power, only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord."

The thought that unselfish virtue exists in any heart, is an idea that has been ridiculed by skeptics of every age. It is a maxim of the world that every man has his price. Some, it

is true, are better than others, but the doctrine of self-denial and fleshly mortifications is ever regarded as the distempered dream of a raving fanatic. Such and such a man appears to be just and upright only because temptation has not been presented. There is no such thing in the earth as genuine faith and essential goodness. Job himself would be just like other people, provided his property were taken away and the waters of tribulation poured into his cup. For his pretended piety, he gets good wages. He has a hedge about him and about his house; the work of his hand has been blessed and his substance is increased in the land. Job's service of God is selfish, based upon the possession and prospect of gain. Satan hereby joins issue with the Almighty. And now upon the integrity of Job as he passes through the deep waters, is to be staked the honor and fair name of the believer in all coming generations. All that Job has is placed in Satan's power, and the dread ordeal forthwith proceeds.

1. "And there was a day when his sons and

daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house; and there came a messenger unto Job, and said, the oxen were ploughing and the asses feeding beside them; and the Sabeans fell upon them and took them away; yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee."

2. "While he was yet speaking there came also another and said, The fire of God is fallen from heaven and hath burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee."

3. "While he was yet speaking there came also another and said, The Chaldeans made out three bands and fell upon the camels and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee."

4. "While he was yet speaking there came also another and said, Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house; and behold there came a great wind from the wilderness and smote

the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee."

Thus, in a moment and without warning, Job's earthly possessions perished. He had been a rich man and was accustomed to look out with satisfaction at eventide from the tent-door upon his thousands of camels and oxen and asses which fed in the pastures. To this man was granted every comfort and luxury that money can buy. He was independent of kinsfolk and neighbors. But, suddenly, "the greatest of all the men of the East" went down into deep, unexplained poverty. Nor is this all; the father of a numerous household, in one brief hour, in submission it may be to a divine but a deeply mysterious Providence, is called upon to surrender every child of his love, from the oldest to the youngest. Not a son or a daughter was allowed to escape, whose gentle and tender entreaties might have ministered consolation to an aged and stricken parent. All, all, are swept away. Job was childless and poor. Poverty itself, to those who were

once affluent, is a trial not to be despised. If there be talent and piety to use it, wealth is a blessing. It secures advantage and augments power. But the Patriarch is poor. Riches have taken to themselves wings. And not only poor, but childless; and this in a moment. Not a day was allowed for meditation and prayer. The fell blow descended without premonition or preparation. Messenger after messenger came in haste saying, thy oxen and asses are stolen, thy servants are slain, thy sheep are burned up, thy camels are carried away, and while thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house, behold there came a great wind from the wilderness and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men and they are dead. Job's cup seems to be full, for waves and billows go over him. All his hedges are broken down. In this day of sore trial, "when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men bow themselves," shall the man of tribulation keep covenant with God? Alas! it too often proves true that in

seasons of persecution and pecuniary reverse, the professed disciple turns back and follows the Master no more. And hence the decisions of an uncharitable world are based upon the conduct of those who "go out from us because they were not of us." And it was to stop the mouths of these gainsayers that Jehovah allowed his servant Job to be sifted like wheat. Satan's taunt must be answered by a victory of faith over the temptations of poverty, and those bitter inner conflicts, which are the accompaniments of family bereavement. Satan is allowed to have it all his own way, for a season, with Job. One earthly prop after another breaks down until the only staff that remains, is the promise and providence of God. But this is the point to which the Patriarch was to be brought. The moment is critical—the consequences vital. If Job now stands steadfast, the battle is half won, but if he falters and fails, hell gains the victory and faith shall be eclipsed. The devil plies his temptations to the utmost. All that Job hath is "touched." Children are dead and riches have perished.

What earthly motive is left for the service of God? But it was in this very hour of deep darkness that "Job arose and rent his mantle and shaved his head and fell down on the ground and worshiped, and said, naked came I out of my mother's womb and naked shall I return thither. The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord."

But Satan is not satisfied. He insists that Job's integrity shall be put to yet severer tests. The gage, in the first place, had been offered by the Almighty, and if the wicked one were defeated in this conflict, consternation was inevitable. Satan in person fights the battle, and heaven and hell were deeply interested spectators. Job is a representative man, and if his claims to justice and righteousness are refuted and exposed, the pretensions of the whole race of believers can be easily overthrown. In the present conflict, therefore, the interests of truth and of falsehood are both vitally involved. The devil foiled in one effort returns fiercely to another.

"Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the Lord. And the Lord said unto Satan, From whence comest thou? And Satan answered the Lord and said, From going to and fro in the earth and from walking up and down in it. And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil! And still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movest me against him, to destroy him without cause. And Satan answered the Lord and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now and touch his bone and his flesh and he will curse thee to thy face. And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold he is in thine hand: but save his life." Job therefore, with one single condition subjoined, is handed over body and soul to the buffetings of Satan. Life is to be spared. And this reservation was indispen-

sable, for upon the living testimony of Job alone could be decided the vital question in dispute. Satan accepts the conditions and goes forth in much apparent confidence from the presence of the Almighty. He proceeds with eagerness to smite Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. And Job took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes. Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God, and die.

It will be remembered that Satan's assertion, in substance, was distinctly this: that pure religion and undefiled has no existence in the earth, and that all professions of self-denial and holy living are based upon considerations sordid and visible. When so-called pious people are thoroughly sifted to the bottom, hypocrisy sooner or later will assuredly be revealed. Job's case was no exception. These "hedgings" of the Almighty had only to be removed, and the boasted perfection and uprightness of the Patriarch would be turned into bitterness and cursing. The issue between Satan and

Jehovah is minutely and unmistakably joined It is of the gravest concern too that this all-important question shall be settled definitively, early in the centuries. For if Job triumphs there, then his example shall be recorded as a beacon to encourage and admonish the pure-hearted, but tempted, down to the very "ends of the world."

For the second time Satan attempts to demonstrate that true faith is a figment, and that there exist no affections in the soul, whatever their origin, too pure to be bought. And now, that when the trial of Job is over, all controversy may end, God places at Satan's disposal every object that the natural heart holds dear. Property, position, children and bodily comfort. Apparently forsaken of God, and deserted by man, Job sat down among the ashes and took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal. His way is fenced up. Brethren were far from him, and acquaintance are estranged. "Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God, and die." Earth and hell have now done their utmost to

demoralize. "But Job said, What! shall we receive good at the hand of God and shall we not receive evil?' Faith's victory was complete and glorious. Even Satan himself does not appear again before God to calumniate the integrity and uprightness of Job.

And now, when infidelity reviles, the Church can point with triumphant satisfaction to her worthies, "who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens." Nor does she point to these "worthies" simply as objects of wonder and admiration but as examples to be imitated by every disciple of the Master. We are to follow in their steps. For if the grace of God ever triumphed in one human soul, it can triumph in another. If therefore the church of God can furnish one single instance of complete and final victory over temptation, the mouth of every gainsayer is stopped. It never

has been claimed that the wheat is free of tares, that the purest company of believers may not be defiled by the presence of "whited sepulchres," but it is asserted, and can be maintained, that the Church of God, the ages through, has contained in its bosom a species of self-denying, morally heroic men, to which there is no essential approximation in the generations of this world. For in the very calumnies of Satan against Job there is a virtual admission, that so far from the practice of perfect uprightness, the carnal mind does not believe even in its existence. These strangers and enemies to the truth are not therefore the parties to complain of Christian imperfection, for it is a matter of no little surprise that faith gains any victories at all, when the believer is ever surrounded by such depraved and vicious company.

Nor can it be objected to the validity of Job's fortitude that he was restless and uneasy. For it will have been noted by the careful reader that when tidings of pecuniary loss and family bereavement came to the Patri-

arch's ear he manifested exemplary submission to the unexplained will of God. Those expressions, therefore, which are usually regarded as impatient must be capable of another and satisfactory explanation. If the writer mistakes not, a solution will be found in a just interpretation of the conversations between Job and his friends.

So long as earthly estates and human friendships alone were involved, the Patriarch's patience was humble and distinguished in the very highest degree. His longings were not for the fashions of this world, but his sorrowful soul thirsted after God. For when Satan had expended his wrath to the uttermost upon this humble believer, faith remained steadfast and immovable. But now began another and sorer trial. That God who said of His servant, he is a "just man and eschews evil," not only allows the tempter to buffet, but in order that in the end faith may appear more conspicuous, the Almighty proceeds to conceal the light of His own Divine countenance. It was in the moment of this deep spiritual de-

sertion and gloom that Job's friends come to comfort. They widely mistake, from the first, the Patriarch's true situation and the ground of his troubles. Instead of those words of consolation which are so needful to the broken and contrite spirit, their language was full of reproach and crimination. They sought vainly and foolishly to vindicate God by ungrounded accusations against the feeble and overburdened creature. Because Job suffered, they therefore concluded rashly that Job was specially guilty. For Eliphaz the Temanite said, "Is not thy wickedness great and thine iniquities infinite. For thou hast taken a pledge from thy brother for nought and stripped the naked of their clothing. Thou hast not given water to the weary to drink, and thou hast withholden bread from the hungry. Thou hast sent widows away empty, and the arms of the fatherless have been broken. Therefore snares are round about thee and sudden fear troubleth thee, or darkness that thou canst not see, and an abundance of waters cover thee. If thou returnest to the

Almighty thou shalt be built up, thou shalt put away iniquity far from thy tabernacle."

Job denies most emphatically the charges which are brought against him, and appeals earnestly to God in behalf of his integrity. "As God liveth who hath taken away my judgment; and the Almighty who hath vexed my soul; all the while my breath is in me and the spirit of God is in my nostrils, my lips shall not speak wickedness nor my tongue utter deceit. For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul? Does not God see my ways and count all my steps? Let me be weighed in an even balance that God may know mine integrity. If my step hath turned out of the way, and mine heart walked after mine eyes, and if any blot hath cleaved to my hands, then let me sow and let another eat; yea, let mine offspring be rooted out. If I did despise the cause of my man-servant or of my maid-servant when they contended with me, what, then, shall I do when God riseth up? and when he visiteth, what shall I an-

swer him? If I have withheld the poor from their desire, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail, or have eaten my morsel myself alone and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof; if I have seen any perish for want of clothing or any poor without covering; if his loins have not blessed me, and if he were not warmed with the fleece of my sheep; if I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless when I saw my help in the gate, then let my arm fall from my shoulder-blade, and my arm be broken from the bone."

Job's so-called murmurings, therefore, are but an honest and faithful vindication of personal character from the unfounded and fanatical attacks of his "comforters." His complaints are not against God; but the Patriarch rejects with indignation those interpretations of Divine Providence which are offered by his "friends." Their ill-advised counsels do not reach the source of his trouble. His character and motives are thoroughly misconceived. The Patriarch is not disconsolate on account of earthly joys that have been

taken, but his sorrows are multiplied as he looks now in vain for the light of that countenance which in days that are gone has been so habitually lifted upon him. For what is life to a man like this if God be afar? All else can be borne but that agonizing solitude which comes upon the soul when the face of the Almighty is fearfully averted. Job said, "Oh that my grief were thoroughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together! For now it would be heavier than the sound of the sea; therefore my words are swallowed up. For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinking up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me, therefore I will not refrain my mouth. I will speak in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. If God will not withdraw his anger, the proud helpers do stoop under him. Let him take his rod away from me, and let not his fear terrify me. Therefore am I troubled at His presence, when I consider I am afraid of him. God maketh my heart soft, and the

Almighty troubleth me. Withdraw thine hand far from me, and let not thy dread make me afraid; then call thou and I will answer, or let me speak and answer thou me. Wherefore hidest thou thy face and holdest me for thine enemy? Wilt thou break a leaf driven to and fro? And wilt thou pursue the dry stubble? For thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth. Thou puttest my feet also in the stocks, and lookest narrowly unto all my paths."

Here, then, was the source and foundation of Job's bitterest trials. He honestly desired and fervently prayed to be delivered from sin; he was conscious of inward yearning after holiness, whilst he had the testimony of a good conscience; and yet with it all, clouds and darkness intervened between himself and the Almighty Father. Satanic temptations, bitter tribulations, bodily infirmities, poverty and persecution, these were but as the small dust in the balance when compared with the sorrow which the good man felt in his separations from God.

In the life and struggles of Job are we not forcibly reminded of another and greater sufferer who bore our sorrows and carried our griefs. For thirty-three years His cross was patiently borne, and no expression of complaint ever escaped Him. The treachery of a disciple, the perjury of witnesses, the inhumanity of a judge, the spittings and mockery of the cruel mob, the agony of Gethsemane, the piercing nails—none of these things extracted a word of bitterness; but when the Father withdrew His face, then the Divine Sufferer exclaimed, in mighty agony, "My God, my God, why hast THOU forsaken me?"

Job did not murmur at the loss of earthly objects, but he groaned terribly in spirit at the hidings of a Father's face. He was impatient, no doubt, as other good men would have been, at the earthly views of his "comforters;" but never for once does he charge God foolishly. On the contrary, in the darkest cloud that overshadowed him, he justified the ways of the Almighty. He knew that his Redeemer lived, and longed for that Heavenly

Presence which was inscrutably withdrawn. He could not see how it was possible for a covenant-keeping God to hide himself so long from a justified soul. Those plaintive words of the patriarch is the language of the believer in the furnace; and the Spirit itself maketh intercession for such, with groanings which cannot be uttered. And it was so in the end that the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "My wrath is kindled against thee and against thy two friends; for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right as my servant Job hath." Job had his frailties, and at times spake unadvisedly; but the virtue of his patience consists in the fact that he everywhere vindicates God.

CHAPTER VI

BALAAM, THE MISER.

"BALAAM the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness."—2 PET. ii. 15.

"WHEN the children of Israel set forward and pitched in the plains of Moab, Balak the son of Zippor sought their destruction. To this end, he invokes the aid of Balaam, a corrupt and sordid prophet of those days. To him, he said, Come now, therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people." He sent messengers to Balaam with flattering words and the price of divination. The vain and avaricious prophet invites these elders of Moab and of Midian to lodge with him for a night whilst he can consult God. But Jehovah said unto Balaam, thou shalt not go with them,

thou shalt not curse the people. And this answer was returned to King Balak by his messengers. But Balak sent yet again, princes, more and more honorable. The prophet finally concluded to go. On the way, however, he was met by an angel and punished bodily, while a miraculous rebuke proceeded from the lips of an ass, upon which he rode. When the beast spake and reproved the wicked prophet, he professed to repent. Balaam, nevertheless, went forward after his wages. Sacrifices are offered at four different places and four distinct efforts to curse Israel are made; but every attempt proves wholly ineffectual. So Balaam rose up and went and returned to his own place, and Balak also went his own way. But failing to destroy Israel with curses, the son of Bosor afterward suggests to the king that he should cast a stumbling-block before Jacob, "to eat things sacrificed unto idols and to commit fornication." What could not be effected by altars and sacrifices, might be accomplished most surely by whoredom of the people with the daughters of Moab. The idea

was adopted, the plan partially succeeded, and Balaam got his wages.

From the narrative above we obtain the following emphatic and paramount lessons:

1. Flattery and bribery have been the instruments of Satan from the very beginning. Balaam was plied faithfully with these, and fell. He was overtaken in the identical way that the children of folly have ever been caught. The spoiler spreads his snare, and the silly victim enters the net thinking it a place of shelter and security.

2. The hypocrite bends the knee in prayer not to ascertain the will of God and to do it, but to gain the Divine sanction for some preconcerted lust. A purpose is already cherished, and if heaven lends encouragement well, but if not, the heart of such a man is fully set in him to do evil. Balaam thought it worth the effort to get God on his side, but after all, he loved the wages of unrighteousness essentially better than the Divine approbation. And so not unfrequently has it been found with the professedly pious in every generation. In the

great battles of the soul, lust alas! too often triumphs.

3. There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, the ends whereof are the ways of death. And hence it is impossible always to say, how far an individual may advance, and yet after all, come short of true faith. Balaam said unto the angel of the Lord, I have sinned, for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me; now, therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again. How shall I curse whom God has not cursed, or how shall I defy whom the Lord hath not defied. Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!

4. Difficulties are mercifully thrown in the soul's path to ruin. In the case under consideration there were: 1. God's outspoken warning when He said to Balaam thou shalt not go. 2. An opposing angel with a sword whetted and drawn. 3. Infliction of bodily punishment. 4. A miracle in that the dumb ass spake.

5. At one period or another a struggle the

most momentous agitates the bosom of every descendant of Adam. No man perishes without difficulty and opposition. There is an exact point, too, where the decision is made. Conscience is not wholly stifled at once. Even after years of waywardness and crime there are particular seasons when a sense of accountability solemnly revives, and when there are unexpected flashes of light from an invisible source. No man ever perishes who does not battle against conviction. Significant admonitions are heard, but their voice is unheeded. And yet the very wickedest man will plead the sanctions of conscience. In this name, from generation to generation, what horrible crime has been committed? For wherever a fanatical soul intent on persecution binds and destroys the innocent victim, the identical excuse is always on hand, "I verily thought to do God service." Between these two forces, man's natural inclinations and appetites on the one side, and the word of revelation and celestial expostulation on the other, there has been in every age of the world, a protracted and

terrible conflict. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life search hither and thither throughout the Scriptures and history, to find out a precedent that shall justify iniquity. But the conflict does not endure always. For when the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do wrong, then is the evil called good and good evil, they put darkness for light and light for darkness, bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Nor can the transgressor charge it upon God that the light is insufficient, for the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err, provided he be diligent and honest. Conscience is only silenced when her protests are insultingly unheeded. It is now that iniquity is drawn with cords of vanity and sin as it were with a cart-rope. Every disguise is thrown off, and the man who formerly claimed to be religious will labor, openly and without shame, for the wages of unrighteousness. How melancholy the fact, that there are natures so perverted by appetite, and so besotted by crime, that it gives them a positive satisfaction to cast the stumbling-block of

sin in the unguarded way of others! This was the case with Balaam, who foiled in his first efforts for Balak, now advises the King to overcome Israel by an appeal to concupiscence. Avarice and hypocrisy could accomplish no more. For the very man, who in the beginning, claimed to be conscientious and pious, has descended so low, under the enticements of cupidity and the debasements of lust, that even a nation of Pagans is corrupted by his teachings. That monitor within was so often injured and abused that it reversed its injunctions, and the person who, at one period of life, saw clearly the light, under perversions of conscience, oft repeated and willful, was given up finally to the strong delusions of falsehood.

6. How little does a man know of his own heart. For Balaam answered and said unto the servants of Balak, if Balak should give me his house full of silver and gold I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God to do less or more. Good resolutions are never a safeguard to the soul that dallies with sin. He

who pitches his tent toward Sodom will sooner or later find a way into the city.

7. The instincts of a brute are often better than the perverted conclusions of reason. For the wicked often smite, or otherwise injure those feeble but honest ones, whose dispositions are amiable, and whose purposes are kind.

8. Balak's perseverance was remarkable, and should send the blush of shame to the cheeks of any professed disciple who speedily wearies in well-doing. Balaam utters presentiments of failure, but the wicked monarch is not in the least put back from his purpose. He tries the virtue of four different localities. In each spot an altar is built and sacrifices offered. 1. He selects Kirjathhuzoth, and oxen and sheep are prepared. 2. Afterward Balak took Balaam and brought him up into the high places of Baal, that thence he might see the utmost part of the people. Here were built seven altars, with elaborate offerings. But God put a word in Balaam's mouth, and said, return unto Balak, and thus thou shalt speak.

How shall I curse whom God has not cursed? Or how shall I defy whom the Lord has not defied? For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him, lo! the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations. Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel: Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his! 3. Then Balak said unto Balaam, Come, I pray thee, with me unto another place. And he brought him unto the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and built seven altars, and offered a bullock and a ram upon every altar. But once more there was disappointment. 4. A fourth effort is now made. And Balak said unto Balaam, come, I pray thee, I will bring thee unto another place, peradventure it will please God that thou mayest curse me them from thence. And Balak brought Balaam unto the top of Peor, that looketh toward Jeshimon. And Balaam said unto Balak, Build me here seven altars, and prepare me here seven bullocks and seven rams. And

Balak did as Balaam had said, and offered a bullock and a ram on every altar. And now, though hand had joined in hand for the destruction of God's people, yet the wrath of man was made to praise, and the remainder thereof He restrained. "For Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding in his tents, according to their tribes, and the spirit of God came upon him. And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam, the son of Beor, hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said; he hath said which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eye open: How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's-side, as the trees of lign-aloes which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters. He shall pour the water out of his buckets and his seed shall be in many waters, and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. God brought him forth out of Egypt; he hath, as it were, the strength

of an unicorn; he shall eat up the nations his enemies and shall break their bones and pierce them through with arrows. He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion: who shall stir him up? Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee! And Balaam said unto Balak, Behold, I go unto my people, come, therefore, and I will advertise thee what this people shall do to thy people in the latter days. And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam, the son of Beor, hath said, and the man whose eyes are open, hath said; he hath said which heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the most High, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open. I shall see him, but not now, I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth. And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies, and Israel shall do valiantly. Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion,

and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city. And when he looked on Amalek, he took up his parable, and said: Amalek was the first of the nations, but his latter end shall be, that he perish forever. And he looked on the Kenites and took up his parable, and said, Strong is thy dwelling place, and thou puttest thy nest in a rock. Nevertheless, the Kenite shall be wasted until Asshur shall carry thee away captive. And he took up his parable, and said, Alas! who shall live when God doeth this? And ships shall come from the coast of Chittim and shall afflict Asshur and shall afflict Eber, and he also shall perish forever And Balaam rose up and returned to his place: And Balak also went his way."

9. How futile are combinations of every kind against the people and purposes of Jehovah. The angel of the Lord encampeth round the righteous. The Lord God is a sun and a shield. How true the words of wicked Balaam, How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed, or how shall I defy whom the Lord hath not defied?

10. God raises up obstacles in the soul's way of ruin, but if the heart is perverse and willful, all opposition finally is withdrawn, and the wicked spirit goes to its own place. Jehovah will not keep back His anger forever. "The mills of the gods grind slowly," but surely. Heaven is conscious of power, and therefore works deliberately. But sooner or later every transgressor shall be punished, not one can escape in the end.

11. While a cup of cold water given to a disciple, in the name of a disciple, has its reward, yet wo to them by whom offenses shall come! It were better for these that a millstone were about their necks, and that they were cast into the sea. For he that neglects or despises the believer neglects and despises the Master, and he who aims a blow at the elect, seeks madly to injure the very "apple of God's eye." Therefore, blessed is the person whose God is the Lord.

12. Notwithstanding, Balaam, "in a trance with open eyes," beheld the future glory of Israel, and uttered a prophecy of remarkable

clearness and beauty in regard to the "latter days;" yet his sordid soul still yearned after "the wages of unrighteousness." He turned away from "the goodly tents of Jacob, which were spread forth as the valleys and as a garden by the river's-side," and joined himself to the Midianites; and when Moses set the battle in array, Balaam, the son of Beor, was slain with the sword. How truly has it been written, The wages of sin is death: Let the potsherds of the earth contend with the potsherds of the earth, but wo to him who striveth with his maker. Judgment may be delayed for a season, but he "that, being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be cut off, and that without remedy."

Those who honor God, God will honor. Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and, rejecting the treasures of Egypt, voluntarily chose the reproach of Christ; but all things necessary both for this life and the next were abundantly provided. Balaam, on the other hand, sought his all in the gains and

emoluments of this evil world; to this end he sacrificed honor and resorted to subterfuge, but the great Disposer of events blasted scheme after scheme, until the conclusion of the whole matter was a life of disappointment and a death of despair. How impressive the contrast! How solemn and effectual should be the lesson!

CHAPTER VII.

MOSES, THE INCORRUPTIBLE.

"Ye are not your own."—1 Cor. vi. 19.

"Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple."—Luke xiv. 33.

THERE is no essential antagonism between the Christian life and a position of power and splendor. It is true that not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But yet, along the ages, God has set apart a few names, from this class, to become co-workers in His great providential government. A man must not, of necessity, perish, because he is rich or influential. God himself chose David, and took him from the sheepfolds, and crowned him with wealth, and glory, and honor. He also

elevated Joseph, His servant, to a position only second to that of King Pharaoh. These things could not have been accomplished, if there is a necessary and invariable incompatibility between piety and exalted privilege. We go further. Power, wealth and glory, may, with certain limitations, even be desired by the Christian. When, therefore, Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter he was not determined, in his decision, by any express prohibitory statute contained in the divine canon.

Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he had respect unto the recompense of reward. Pharaoh's daughter is said to have been his only child, and herself childless, and having found Moses, and saved him as she did, they resolved to take him as their son, and so he stood fair to be King of Egypt.

Tradition reports, and Josephus states, that Moses was considered heir of that prosperous kingdom. It was the first throne of the world, and why should not Moses accept it. What power was here! How the Alexanders, Cæsars and Napoleons would have striven through seas of blood to obtain it! And what an honor, too, to the Church to be able to point to one of her own sons, and say, he is seated on the throne of the Pharaohs.

2. As has been remarked, this was a position of power. And who needed the might of a strong arm more than the poor, overtasked Hebrew. Moses could have argued that it was his duty, for his enslaved brethren's sake, to put on the robes of royalty. And how, again, the kingly influence could be exerted in uprooting superstition, and in the destruction of idolatry. And how, at last, he might erect sanctuaries for Jehovah, throughout all the land, and cause to be disseminated, by authority, the great doctrine of "life and immortality?" In every direction power could be used for the furtherance of truth, happiness

and impartial justice. And while a mind like that of Moses is never very largely influenced by "mammon" for its own sake, yet there was a boundless field for the cultivation of science, the advancement of learning, and the exercise of benevolence. How many orphans might be educated, how many alms-houses filled, and how many widowed hearts made to sing. With all this wealth and power, properly expended, Egypt could be made the admiration of the ages.

3. It was a situation peculiarly enticing to honorable ambition, when we remember that from this powerful throne, laws might be issued which would perpetuate the name of the lawgiver, whilst their healthful execution could not fail to elevate the Egyptian, and confer lasting benefits upon the surrounding nations.

4. Another influential motive, which must have weighed upon the mind of Moses, was that instinctive affection for one's offspring which exists in all hearts both civilized and savage. Here were power, and glory, and wealth to himself, and here, too, was a diadem

and royalty for his children after him. When, therefore, Moses rejected a crown for his own head, he refused it for his posterity, it may be, through long generations.

As Moses weighed the considerations, one after another, he might have decided that there is nothing essentially incompatible between a sceptre and true piety. And yet, when he was come to years, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He renounces the prospects and promises held up in "the treasures of Egypt," and chose in their stead, the "reproaches of Christ." Here was an act of self-denial that cannot be practised without pangs and conflicts of unusual severity. At the simple call of conscience, a man of eminent fitness for a throne, renounces a crown and the glory that surrounds it. And in the refusal there was violence offered, not alone to personal feeling; but the appeals of gratitude and love, as he looked upon the queenly foster-mother, had to be disregarded. Pharaoh's daughter rescued the fair but helpless child when he lay cradled in the bulrushes. She

graciously condescended to adopt him into her own favored circle. To this noble woman Moses owed his all, of life, learning and position. The character of Moses, also, goes far to demonstrate that the daughter of Pharaoh had discharged the duties of a mother faithfully and well. And now this gentle and noble benefactress stands at his side, to offer a crown, and plead for its acceptance, and that, too, upon the high ground of gratitude and filial affection. Shall he repudiate the claim? Shall the entreaties of this beneficent woman be unheeded and ineffectual? All large, full souls abhor ingratitude. Upon a sensitive magnanimous nature there is no argument so powerful as the desires and happiness of a generous benefactor. And yet Pharaoh's daughter could not prevail with her adopted son. He refused.

It is now that Moses turns from the throne and casts his lot with an exiled and suffering people, who, though his kindred according to the flesh, believed not in him nor desired his kind offices; for his very first efforts in

The Library, Union Theological Seminary

their behalf were told to his prejudice; and when the king sought to slay him, Moses fled into Midian for forty years. After this exile was accomplished, he returned to Egypt once more and delivered his kindred from bondage; but they were ever filled with murmurings and unbelief. Forty years of wilderness life lay before him, and the whole way was to be marked by afflictions, discouragements, warfare and death. To the natural eye, the journey throughout must have appeared dark and sad in the extreme; and yet, when Moses was come to years, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter! He rejected the treasures of Egypt and accepted the "reproach of Christ." Reproach was the inevitable result of his decision. The enticements of his own natural heart, the accusations of Pharaoh's house, the ingratitude and dissatisfaction of the Israelites,—these were the difficulties which oppressed him; but, on the other hand, was the voice of conscience and a sense of duty. The love of Christ constrained. He forsook all that he might follow

the Master. This much, in his case, could not be effected without "reproach." But when he "was come to years" he deliberately chose. To refuse a throne with its honor and glory and power was to provoke the charge of foolishness. To absolve the ties which bound him to "Pharaoh's daughter" seemed to bear on its face the semblance of heartlessness or cold indifference; whilst to become the leader of enslaved, oppressed and unenlightened Hebrews, was a position fraught with dangers, self-denial and persecution. But Moses makes the manly decision. He was to suffer, it was true, but he was to suffer as a Christian. He "was come to years" now; and looking calmly at the treasures of Egypt on the one hand and the reproach of Christ on the other, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

That there was a mighty struggle in the mind of Moses, that self stood over against self, that one antagonism battled with another until the man's spirit reeled under the fearful ordeal, it is but fair to conjecture. But here is

the grandest spectacle that the human eye ever meets. Reader, you may have faced the cannon's mouth, aye, you may have pressed forward to victory through the cries and groans of dying comrades, while all around you, thick as hail, flew the dread missiles of death; but your greatest battle is yet to be fought; for the man who can cut off his right hand when it offends, or pluck out the right eye when it misleads, or can turn away from a throne when it dishonors, this soul gains a victory whose honors are more imperishable than the laurels of the brave or the diadem of kings; for greater is he who rules his own spirit than he who takes a city. When you have taken the world within, with its lust, its pride, its selfishness, and bound these fast upon the altar, then you are a victor. But dream not of true glory until these lists have been entered and this battle has been won; for here is the arena upon which the great representative men of the world wrestle into light. And how are we to ascend to such a choice? The answer is, by faith. That faith that has

"respect unto the recompense of reward;" that faith which is the substance of things hoped for—that looks into the far distant future and realizes it. For as the eagle, rejoicing in the light, builds his eyrie on the lofty rock where no missiles of the fowler can reach, so the man of faith seeks a habitation in the mount of God and smiles defiance at the angry foe; for underneath are the everlasting arms, on every side Jehovah's shield, while overhead, in unfading beauty, shines forevermore the glorious sun of righteousness. The "treasures of Egypt" and the "recompense" of another kingdom stood out boldly before the eye of faith. The reproach of Christ has its fleshly humiliations, its burdens and its thorns; but it is the consciousness of duty well done that constitutes the ground of all true joy either here or hereafter. This is the Christian's "excelsior." Moses saw the true glory from afar and chose. Pharaoh's kingdom and all earthly kingdoms beside crumble and vanish; but there is a throne established in the heavens whose foundations

are everlasting. Whilst an earthly crown is not to be despised for its own sake, yet the way to heaven for Moses did not lie in that direction. There was first the cross and afterward the crown. If pride, self-indulgence and ambition invited Moses to the reception of Egypt's wealth, there was another finger that pointed to the reproach of Christ. Faith saw the handwriting, heard the voice and followed.

The lesson of this narrative is self-abnegation. For ye are not your own, "ye are bought with a price." He who presents his body a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, does so unconditionally and irreversibly. Ever afterwards conformity to the world is treachery and bad faith. Even the gift by a Jew on an earthly altar was "Corban." It could never be reclaimed or appropriated to the giver's private uses. How much more imperative it is that the soul should keep covenant with God? The daughter of Pharaoh saved Moses from the bulrushes, and thereby rescued the body; but there was

another Benefactor who bore his griefs and carried his sorrows, who made His soul an offering for sin, and by agony and blood purchased an "eternal redemption." His obligation therefore was complete. "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" must be the question of every redeemed and justified saint. "But if any man draw back my soul shall have no pleasure in him." The man of true faith renounces the world as a portion. If the Holy Ghost witnesseth that in every city there are bonds and afflictions awaiting, none of these things move him; neither does he count his life dear unto himself so that he may finish his course with joy and the ministry which he has received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. In this probationary world he is the "purchased possession" of Jesus Christ, and there is a willingness and anxiety to be employed, in conformity to the Master's preference, and in furtherance of the glory of His kingdom. The reward is not anticipated during the heat and burden of the day, but the laborer is con-

tent to patiently wait till the even shall come, when the Lord of the vineyard will say unto His steward, "Call the laborers and give them their hire."

CHAPTER VIII.

MORDECAI AND ESTHER; OR, WAITING AND WATCHING.

"In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength."—Isa. xxx. 15.
"I waited for the Lord; and he inclined unto me and heard my cry."—Ps. xl. 1.
"Their strength is to stand still."—Isa. xxx. 7.

MORDECAI and his people were captives in Persia. Ahasuerus was King. And in those days the sovereign made a feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan, the palace. And on the seventh day, when the King's heart was merry with wine, he commanded the chamberlains to bring Vashti, the Queen, before the king, with the crown royal, to shew the people and the princes her beauty. But the Queen Vashti refused to come at the King's commandment:

therefore was the King very wrath, and his anger burned in him. Then it was unalterably decreed that Vashti should come no more before Ahasuerus, and her royal estate was given unto another. After these things, when the wrath of the King was appeased, he appointed officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they might gather together all the fair young virgins unto Shushan, the palace, that the maiden which pleased the King should be Queen instead of Vashti. Now, in Shushan, the palace, there was a certain Jew, whose name was Mordecai, who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity which had been carried away with Jeconiah, King of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, had carried away. And he brought up Hadassah (that is Esther), his uncle's daughter: for she had neither father nor mother, and the maid was fair and beautiful; whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter. So it came to pass, when the King's commandment and his decree were heard, and when many maidens were

gathered together unto Shushan, the palace, Esther also was brought. Esther, however, had not shewed her people nor her kindred: for Mordecai had charged her that she should not shew it. And Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women's house, to know how Esther did, and what should become of her. At length, when the time came, as the custom was, for Esther to be taken unto King Ahasuerus, into his house royal, the King loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her Queen instead of Vashti. Then Mordecai sat in the King's gate; for Esther had not yet showed her kindred, nor her people, as Mordecai had charged her: for Esther did the commandment of Mordecai, like as when she was brought up with him. In those days, while Mordecai sat in the King's gate, two of the King's chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh, sought to lay hands on Ahasuerus, and the thing was known to Mordecai, who told it unto Esther, the Queen; and

Esther certified the King thereof in Mordecai's name. And when inquisition was made of the matter, it was found out: therefore, they were both hanged on a tree; and it was written in the book of the chronicles before the King. After these things did King Ahasuerus promote Haman, the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him. And all the King's servants that were in the King's gate, bowed and reverenced Haman: but Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence. And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath: Wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai. Haman said unto the King, there is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom, and their laws are diverse from all people, neither keep they the King's laws; therefore, it is not for the King's profit to suffer them. If it please the King, let it be

written that they may be destroyed: and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those that have charge of the business, to bring it into the King's treasures. And the King took his ring from his hand and gave it unto Haman, the son of Hammedatha, the Jews' enemy. And the King said unto Haman, The silver is given to thee, the people also, to do with them as seemeth good to thee. Then were the scribes called, and letters were sent by post into all the King's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, and to take the spoil of them for a prey. The posts went out, and the King and Haman sat down to drink. But the city of Shushan was perplexed. It was now that Mordecai bestirs himself. For when he perceived all that was done, he rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and bitter cry; and came before the King's gate. Mordecai, as was designed, attracted the attention of persons within the

King's court. It is at this moment that Esther steps upon the stage. The Queen was exceeding grieved at the tidings of Mordecai's lamentations, as borne to her ears by her maids and chamberlains. She sent messengers forthwith to her uncle to know "what it was and why it was." And Mordecai told Hatach of all that had happened, and gave him a copy of the writing of the decree to show it unto Esther, and to charge her that she should go in unto the King, to make supplication unto him, and to make request before him for her people. And Hatach came and told Esther the words of Mordecai. Again Esther spake unto Hatach and gave him commandment unto Mordecai: All the King's servants and the people of the King's provinces do know that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live, but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days. And they told to

Mordecai Esther's words. Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place, but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this? Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer: Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law, and if I perish, I perish.

There are moments in life's history when every activity of the soul is bestirred. Questions the most momentous clamor for an answer. Upon the shoulders of this fair queen no burden so heavy had ever before been imposed. What shall be done? Does she pause and balance the arguments? If I go in, 1. a

crown may be lost. 2. The affections of my husband may depart. 3. Vashti was banished for disobedience, and how shall I escape. 4. Can I not plead the law of self-preservation? 5. My uncle is greatly bewildered by sorrow, and may miscalculate the chances. 6. At any rate, even supercilious Haman will hardly venture so far as to assassinate the wife of his sovereign. Her soul is agitated to the bottom. For on the other side there is 1. Self-respect. 2. Calls of conscience. 3. Nationalities. 4. Gratitude to her uncle. 5. Fear and favor of God. She decides. *I will go in, and if I perish, I perish!* A noble act disburdens the spirit, roots up difficulties, and makes the heart strong. The queen determines to go, and a consciousness of rectitude enhances her beauty. As she approaches the sovereign, he looks upon her fair face and is conquered. He held out the golden sceptre that was in his hand. Esther, however, proceeds cautiously to her work. For when the king said unto her, What wilt thou, Queen Esther, and what is thy request? it shall be given thee to the half of the kingdom. Then

Esther answered, If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him. The banquet was prepared, and the invited guests were in attendance. The king again said unto Esther, What is thy petition? Then answered Esther, and said, My petition and request is for another banquet to-morrow, and when the king and Haman are come I will do as the king hath said. The curtain now falls for a moment, whilst the mighty monarch of Persia retires to his chamber for repose. But the king could not sleep. For what is the mightiest of this earth's sovereigns, after all, but a man! And there are ever recurring periods in human experience, when the sins of bygone years return upon the soul in appalling freshness. These dread revelations of the past flash upon the mind as when the guilty conscience paints, in the deep darkness, some horrid phantom intent, inexorably, on revenge. Transgression, blessed be God, can be forgiven, and there is hope and promise even for the chief of sinners, but ever and anon, while we

tabernacle here, biting and terrible memories of flagrant disobedience and woful derelictions are permitted to return, to humble our pride and stimulate activity. In the deep visions of the night anguish took hold of Ahasuerus, and a handwriting upon the heart pointed the proud monarch to duties unperformed and obligations disregarded. He commanded the book of records of the chronicles to be brought, and they were read before the king. And it was found that Mordecai, the Jew, saved the king's life, but the benefactor had been forgotten. And the king said, What honor and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this. Then said the king's servants, that ministered unto him, There is nothing done for him.

Esther, it will be remembered, invoked the prayers of her people, and "at the beginning of their supplications the commandment came" and an unseen messenger entered, uncalled, into the inner court of the king and waited not a moment for the "golden sceptre" to be held out. The eyelids of the monarch were touched, and slumber departed. Conscience

was aroused, and voices of ominous portent called to him from the past. For there are periods of awful solemnity in the evolutions of religious consciousness, when the soul gains clearer views of its own individual responsibility, and the shocking incompleteness with which all duties have been discharged. At such a moment the sins of the past are uncovered, while the Almighty passes by unveiling "amid thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud" a small portion of His holiness. In this awful hour there is an eye of infinite brightness that searches the heart and tries the reins until "the keepers of the house tremble, and strength fails because of iniquity, and the very bones are consumed."

And the king said, Who is in the court? (Now Haman was come into the outward court of the king's house, to speak unto the king to hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him.) And the king's servants said unto him, Behold, Haman standeth in the court. And the king said, Let him come in. So Haman came in. And the king said

unto him, What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor? (Now Haman thought in his heart, to whom would the king delight to do honor more than to myself.) And Haman answered the king, For the man whom the king delighteth to honor, let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse the king rideth upon, and the crown royal that is set upon his head. And let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honor, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor. Then the king said to Haman, Make haste and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king's gate: let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken. Then took Haman the apparel and the horse and arrayed Mordecai, and brought him on horseback through the street of the

city, and proclaimed before him, Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor. And Mordecai came again to the king's gate. But Haman hasted to his house mourning and having his head covered.

Let the reader look upon these two men as they go forth from the king's palace. Mordecai has just been crowned with all the honors which a delighted and grateful monarch can bestow, but instead of vain-glorious boastings and self-gratulation, he seizes the first opportunity to return unostentatiously to his former humble position at the gate of the king. For a work to which he was honorably pledged was not yet fully complete, and this sagacious servant of God was too deeply versed in the weakness of human nature, not to understand fully how much better and surer it is "to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes."

Haman, on the other hand, turned away chagrined and disconsolate. "The glory of his riches and the multitude of his children and all the things wherein the king had promoted him," yea, all this availed him nothing,

so long as he sees Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate. Nor does the Prime Minister for this once receive any encouragement at home. For his wife, with a woman's quick intuitions, spake a word of solemn premonition. Then said his wise men and Zeresh, his wife, unto him, if Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him.

The "morrow" has dawned, and while Haman yet talks with Zeresh and the wise men of his household, the king's chamberlains came and hasted to bring him unto the banquet that Esther had prepared. So the king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen. And the king said again unto Esther on the second day at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition, Queen Esther? and it shall be granted thee; and what is thy request, and it shall be performed, even to the half of the kingdom. Then Esther the Queen answered and said, If I have found favor in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at

my petition and my people at my request; for we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage. Then the king Ahasuerus answered and said unto Esther the queen, Who is he and where is he that durst presume in his heart to do so? And Esther said, the adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen. The king rose from the banquet of wine in great rage, and went forth in the palace garden, while Haman entreated the queen most pitifully for his life. But a decree had gone forth in another Court, and the writing sealed with the king's signet. So Haman's days were numbered, and the hour of reprieve was past. And Harbonah, one of the chamberlains, said before the king, Behold also the gallows, fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai, who had spoken good for the king, standeth in the house of Haman. Then said the king hang him thereon.

So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai! It was thus that the vaulting ambition of the king's favorite overreached itself. For He that ruleth over all turned against Haman himself the very instruments of destruction which he had wickedly prepared for another. And so it has been true from of old that the transgressor falls into his own net, while the righteous man, withal, escapes. He that sitteth in the heavens allows the kings of the earth to set themselves, and the rulers to take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed, until His own purposes are complete; then He speaks unto them in His wrath, He breaks their bands asunder and casts away their cords. It has been the lot of many noble souls to "dwell apart," working out problems, upon whose proper solution depend at some future day the liberty and happiness of thousands. These men labor on and wait with no expectation of present approval. The voice of conscience and the love of truth is their only consolation. For the world admires tinsel, and it is in suc-

cessful diplomacy and well fought battles and kingly magnificence that the multitude discovers true glory. It matters not that statesmen are corrupt, that rulers are despotic, and that appalling carnage marks the course of victory, yet the deed is applauded and the hero canonized! The wicked Hamans of this world never lack for parasites, so long as spoils and place are at their disposal. For the popular mind is trained to look at the present, and he who now flourishes at court is of far more importance to the seeker of office than the man of deep philosophy and true virtue, who "sits at the gate." But the enlightened eye detects from afar the eventual reward. A thousand years with the Almighty is as a day, and a day as a thousand years. And hence all great events move slowly toward their final accomplishment. For in every community and nation, a multiplicity of agencies are ever at work; and before the purposes of Providence can be fully unfolded, the poles of divine influence, from every direction, must approximate and coalesce. The man of strong faith

and deep intuition perceives this and bides, patiently, his time. How instructive in this light are the history and character of Mordecai.

1. He was a stranger in a strange land, and Haman the Amalekite sought his destruction and that of his kindred. Mordecai, possibly, could have secured personal safety by flight, but he refuses every immunity for himself which was not, in an equal degree, vouchsafed to his suffering and imperiled fellow countrymen. He put on sackcloth and mourned for his people. This man was loyal to race and country, and where these sacred fires are kindled, no position, however lowly, is despised, provided it can be shown that a necessity of state demands its occupation.

2. Mordecai was a man of magnanimity and decision. The king's life at one time depended upon promptness and resolution. Two bold bad men laid in wait for the monarch, and he was saved not by the hand of a native-born subject, but by the skill and faithfulness of a persecuted captive.

3. Mordecai was possessed of uncomplaining endurance. His services were registered, it is true, but speedily forgotten, whilst Haman, a wicked and unscrupulous sycophant, occupies the post of courtly honor and power. A weaker nature would have grumbled, while it hawked about its wrongs and misfortunes. But Mordecai waited at the king's gate; for he had other and sterner work to do.

4. Mordecai, like all other great souls, was a man of genuine sensibility and gentle affections. In the providence of God a befitting opportunity arises for the gratification of this warmth of his nature. An uncle, who died in captivity, left behind him a dependent orphan. Hadassah (that is Esther) was the name of the "fair and beautiful maid who had neither father nor mother." When loved ones were dead, Mordecai hastened to adopt this all-unfriended child as his own. And this beneficent act, like all others, brought its own "exceeding great reward." The noble heart of Mordecai itself found a solace from care in those lessons of hope, courage, truth and

piety which he instilled, day by day, into the bright and susceptible mind of another. He, no doubt, recounted many a true tale of national history, and patiently unfolded those covenants and blessings which, upon returning repentance and humility, were to be the heritage of her people for long generations. His own manly heart beat the tenderer and truer as he came into contact with this young and guileless nature, and attempted to mould it for deeds of true glory. To "the king's servants," who looked upon Mordecai only when in stern disapprobation he turned aside from bribery and wrong, the Jew's countenance, no doubt, seemed cold and apathetic; but could any have entered that inner chamber where the foster-father and his gentle pupil were alone, it was there that the heart unfolded a wealth of affection and sympathy not even surpassed by its fortitude and courage. Mordecai's deeply appreciative nature attempted, by every gentle and affectionate courtesy, to compensate for that bitter bereavement which Esther had sustained in the loss of both father and mother

5. Mordecai was conscientious; for by conformity to a single heathen custom persecution might have been avoided. But such obeisance as Haman demanded was disloyalty to heaven; and the moment Mordecai bowed religiously to any mere creature the glory and boast of Israel were departed, while an enlightened eye like his saw clearly that every compromise with sin is a "devil's highway." Subterfuge never has, and never can, remove difficulty. It only adjourns to augment. If the plague-spot exists at all, when the day of palliatives ends, as end it must, the roots of the disease will be past eradication. Mordecai, with his clear, deep insight, struck the enemy at the right moment; for from the very first hour when Divine honors were demanded, the pious Hebrew, although humble in position and humanly unsupported, sternly refused. The king's servants were amazed and astir. The "business" was reported forthwith to Haman to see whether Mordecai's matters would stand; but under every wicked combination the Hebrew was wedded to the right.

6. Mordecai was a man of profound sagacity. It was to the faithful training of her foster-father that Queen Esther owed the crown which she wore, while the charming character of his pupil, now ripened into womanhood and seated on a throne, established most clearly the wisdom of the teacher. The foresight of Mordecai is still farther evident from his readiness to detect, and his aptness to prevent, a conspiracy against the king, as well as from that accurate information, which he so seasonably possessed, in regard to certain secret purposes of the court.

7. Mordecai was a man of work. He sat at the king's gate as a watcher. Where the interests of his people were involved, no crisis was unseen, no opportunity neglected. His deeply meditative mind saw danger from afar, and with an energy that corresponded, every forefending influence, physical and moral, was subordinated to his purpose. He was the intellectual king of his people; not simply the protector of one orphaned household, but to

his guardianship was committed the welfare of a nation. Here is work for the strongest; for, under the circumstances, the task in Mordecai's case was so diversified and difficult, that whoever else at the king's gate might be idle, he must be busy.

8. Mordecai was a man of virtue and genuine courage. This was demonstrated by the whole tenor of his life. The soul, intent on right, has an enemy to conquer more powerful by far than an army with banners. For there is a law in our members, that when we would do good, evil is present with us. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life stand up to oppose. The arena is changed, but the conflict proceeds. Day after day, unobserved by the world, does the spirit wrestle in agony; for in this warfare there are no roll of drums, no waving ensign, no visible leader, no spectators to encourage. The battle rages fiercely deep down in the heart "where none but God can see." But the highest developments of true courage culminate in patience, self-denial, endurance and

hope. These inward struggles cannot be witnessed by the multitude, yet ONE EYE beholds, and no chivalrous deed is ever unrewarded, though, for a season, it may be, promotion is delayed. God shall reveal it in His own time that more glorious and imperishable are the victories of faith than all the renowned triumphs of earth's military chieftains.

9. Mordecai's faith never failed. He felt that deliverance, in some form and by some means would certainly come. The truest and noblest of human hearts, however dark the day, never entirely lose confidence in that Omnipotent arm that sooner or later vindicates the right. As sanctification progresses, the soul gets nearer in likeness to God; and since the good man himself would sacrifice even life for the truth, how can there be barren despair with such a heart as this in reference to His interposition, when the conflict demands it, who has all power in heaven and upon earth, and in whose bosom justice and righteousness are enthroned? Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? and will

He ever consent that falsehood, in any issue, shall finally triumph.

10. Mordecai was humble. The elevated Christian is conscious of an ever-growing conviction of personal unworthiness, and that every real superiority of talent or position is attributable, at last, to the free grace of God. By the rich and gifted, by the exalted and powerful, the question who made thee to differ, is an interrogatory that should be evermore propounded; and if the heart is honest, one answer only can be returned, not I, but the grace of God which is with me. In the case of Mordecai, adversity did not corrupt nor could prosperity bewilder. When all his great services were apparently overlooked, not a word of impatience ever escaped. To be employed at all was an honor too great. When arrayed in the apparel of Ahasuerus and heralded through the streets as the man whom the king delighted to honor, Mordecai only tolerated the ceremony, and after the pageant was over, went back quickly without boast or vainglory to his untitled place at the gate of the palace.

In what melancholy contrast is the character of Haman. In the composition of his nature, lust of power, greed of adulation and love of money, constitute the chief elements. He comes to position one knows not how; but, from subsequent events, the suspicion is strong that bribery had its share in the work; for he who could give ten thousand talents of silver to exterminate a captive and his friends, would not hesitate to purchase, at any price, position and power in the cabinet of a king where extortion and robbery could quickly make amends. Haman, moreover, was vain and conceited, and, like all shallow natures, he loved "the pomp and circumstance" of place. His dreams at night could not be sweet while even a poor Jew refused to worship and applaud. For with Haman, as with all coarse, vulgar souls, honor is nothing if the world appears ignorant and fails to shout hosannah. Even in the circle of home, where self and ambition should give place to courteous words and graceful deeds, the thirst for praise follows him like a demon. He recounts

with silly vanity, even in the family, his honors and favors at the feast of Queen Esther. He tells of the glory of his riches and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king, and how Esther, the queen, did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet which she had prepared but himself. Yet all this availed Haman nothing, so long as he sees Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate. This obdurate Hebrew must be humbled. Here is the only "dead fly in the ointment." Vanity, however, shall be appeased if countless streams of blood is the price. Haman here exhibits that reckless cruelty which so often combines with complacent and cowardly natures. And so when trial and danger overtake this man we find no redeeming quality. He trembles like a poltroon, and begs like a conscience-stricken culprit, while his latter end was as contemptible and unregretted as his life had been unprincipled and pusillanimous.

It has been seen, however, that with all the intellectual and moral superiority of Mordecai, Haman, for a long season, was preferred before him. Nor need this be surprising when the ways of Divine Providence toward this fallen and self-seeking world are carefully and reverentially considered. For while it is a common opinion among mankind that no great and honorable exploit is achievable without a conspicuous arena, yet if we examine more deeply, the truth will be evident that it is no infrequent device of the Almighty to place, upon seasonable probation, those individuals whose lives and labors are intended, in after years, to be made illustrious and representative; and the man who objects to the education and discipline demonstrates, unmistakably, insufficiency and unfitness for the position and honor. The truly noble soul asks not for place but for opportunity; for the attitude of "door-keeper" becomes a post of high honor the moment it can be demonstrated that the finger of God and the calls of duty are imperative. And he who stickles for rank in the

accomplishment of worthy ends may be certain of this, that the cause of justice and the love of truth are not the mainsprings of action in his own selfish soul.

God, it may be repeated, puts men upon trial. David, the son of Jesse, did not reach the throne by one cheap, easy step. Cruel persecutions and years of rigid discipline were allotted between the hour of anointment and the day of coronation. He who was destined of God for the world's greatest throne had first to find him a home in the mountain and cave, and to learn lessons of sympathy and magnanimity there, from individual suffering, in unattended exile. Look again to the history and character of Joseph. What a moral have we here for the youth of all generations! A young man, the son of an honored father, is inhumanly treated by his brethren, violently forced from country, kinsfolk and parents, and trafficked away cruelly to Midianitish merchantmen to be held as a slave. No helping hand is near. In the land to which Joseph was dragged, the avocation

of his fathers was held in contempt and abomination. The prospect was gloomy indeed. But there remained to him yet integrity, perseverance and humble trust in God. This was his capital. First experiences were discouraging, and occasional clouds, no doubt, overhung the youthful spirit; but one apparent failure after another was met by earnest faith and "stern endeavor." In every vicissitude, Joseph remembered the God of his fathers and took courage. For early lessons of piety are a heritage which can never be lost. The exiled boy endured patiently the trial, and at an hour the most suitable, advancement and "the recompense" came. A prison was exchanged for a palace and vassalage for a sceptre. The parallel here between Joseph and Mordecai is obvious and striking. In each case, when the solemn crisis arrives, it is ascertained most clearly that no time has been lost; for every antecedent suffering and labor was a preparatory necessity. And the mission of these captive Jews had its starting-point far back in the

past, and steadily progressed ever afterward without essential retardment or interruption. Anterior discipline trained their spirits for circumspect action, whilst time and the providence of God introduced efficient and invaluable helpers near the person of the king. And just at the moment when every instrument is prepared, and the purposes of the Almighty fully ripe, the drama proceeds. For farther examples need the reader be pointed to Moses and Paul and John the Baptist and others on that long list of worthies too numerous to mention.

God reigns. At no time and in no way has He abdicated His authority over any portion of our earth, much less any one of its kingdoms. He works His will, not only in the armies of heaven, but among the inhabitants of the earth. He strikes through kings in the day of his wrath. The heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing. The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed, saying, Let us break their bands

asunder and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh the Lord shall have them in derision. For by Him kings reign and princes decree justice. For it is He that putteth down one and setteth up another.

2. There is a marvellous but inseparable relation between the plans of Jehovah and the prayers and efforts of His people. It is true that in one sense "God ordains whatsoever comes to pass," but "the faith and patience of the saints" are bound up with the everlasting covenant, and earthen vessels are a necessity of Divine appointment. To the apostle the promise was made positively, that every one aboard the vessel should be saved, but when the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, except these abide in the ship ye cannot be saved. The focus of Divine Providence and human instrumentality were not entirely interblended, and the period for disembarkment, therefore, had not fully arrived. It is true that the Omnipotent Creator is in no sense

dependent on the will of His creatures, yet justice allows, and mercy appoints a field for co-operation, even to the humblest. For it is a law in the Divine economy that nothing shall be lost. Prayer and effort although subordinate, are nevertheless pre-ordained, and therefore indispensable agencies, not only in the merciful execution of redemption, but also in the accomplishment of God's purposes, in all their diversity, toward individuals and nations. The earthen vessel is weak but grace has been provided, and then through Christ who strengthens him, the believer can do all things. God works, and so must the creature; for latitude has been allowed for the diligent application of every gracious endowment. Occupy till I come, are the words of that Nobleman who has gone into a far country to receive for Himself a kingdom; and when He returns He will call for His servants, that "unto every one which hath shall be given, while from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have."

3. Prayer and faith are effectual and invinci-

ble. For there is no element in mind or matter which these agencies have not overcòme. Winds, waves, sunshine, pestilence, clouds, famine, abundance, sickness, death, all have yielded to their power. Here is a combination that subdues kingdoms, works righteousness, obtains promises, stops the mouths of lions, quenches the violence of fire, escapes the edge of the sword, gives strength out of weakness, waxes valiant in fight, and turns to flight the armies of the aliens. All things are possible to him that believeth. It matters not, therefore, how imposing the obstacle, nor how few in number and lowly, the saints, if these faithful ones will only wait patiently at the King's gate, victory and deliverance, in some form, sooner or later, shall be sure.

4. The reader can now see clearly that waiting upon God is not drowsy inaction. Faith is an operative gift, and every justified soul demands work. The servant of the Lord must be busy though it cost him "journeyings and perils, weariness and painfulness, watchings often, hunger and thirst, fastings often, cold

and nakedness, always observant of Providence and ever ready to co-operate."

CHAPTER IX.

SAMSON, THE AVENGER.

"Who art thou that judgest another."—Jas. iv. 12.

"And behold there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last."—Luke xiii. 30.

"Though he fall he shall not be utterly cast down."—Psalm xxxvii. 24.

"In the awful mystery of human life it is a consolation sometimes to believe that our mistakes, perhaps even our sins, are permitted to be instruments of our education for immortality."—Anon.

THERE was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah, and his wife was barren and bare not. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto the woman and said unto her, Behold now thou art barren, and bearest not; but thou shalt conceive and bear a son. Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine, nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing. For lo, thou shalt conceive and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head; for the child

shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines. . . . . And the woman bare a son and called his name Samson. And the child grew and the Lord blessed him. And the spirit of the Lord began to move him at times in the camp of Dan. Samson desires a wife of the Philistines, and on the journey to Timnath, behold a young lion roared against him. And the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand. Samson makes a marriage feast and puts forth a riddle and offers thirty sheets and thirty change of garments to the guest who would expound it. An answer is gained fraudulently and the unmerited price demanded. But the spirit of the Lord came upon Samson and he went down to Ashkelon, and slew thirty men of them, and took their spoil and gave change of garments unto them which expounded the riddle. Samson is denied his wife, but he burns the Philistines' corn with foxes and firebrands. Samson's wife and father are burned

by their kindred; and Samson said unto them though ye have done this, yet will I be avenged of you. And he smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter. Afterward he went down and dwelt in the top of the rock Etam. Then the Philistines went up and pitched in Judah, and spread themselves in Lehi. And the men of Judah said, Why are ye come up against us? And they answered, to bind Samson are we come up, to do to him as he hath done to us. Then three thousand men of Judah went to the top of the rock Etam and said to Samson, Knowest thou not that the Philistines are rulers over us? What is this thou hast done unto us? And he said, As they have done unto me, so have I done unto them? And they bound him with two new cords and brought him up from the rock. And when he came unto Lehi the Philistines shouted against him, and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands. And he found a new jaw-bone of an ass, and put

forth his hand and took it and slew a thousand men therewith. . . . . Then went Samson to Gaza and saw there an harlot and went in unto her. And it was told the Gazites, saying, Samson is come hither. And they compassed him in, and laid wait for him all night in the gate of the city, and were quiet all the night, saying, in the morning when it is day we shall kill him. And Samson lay till midnight, and arose at midnight, and took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and put them upon his shoulders and carried them up to the top of an hill that is before Hebron. And it came to pass afterward that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. This woman was corrupted by the Philistines, and enticed, wickedly, her husband. Thrice she is deceived, but at last she overcomes. And while Samson slept upon her knees she caused the seven locks of his head to be shaven off, and his strength went from him. The Philistines took him and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza and bound him

with fetters of brass, and he did grind in the prison-house. But the hair of his head began to grow again, and his strength being renewed, he pulled down the house upon the Philistines and thereby perished with his enemies.

What a singular history is this! What a medley of virtue and vice! And yet the name of Samson is enrolled among the worthies. For the time would fail me, says the Apostle, to tell of Gideon and of Barak and of Samson, etc., who through faith subdued kingdoms, etc. Nor was this information imparted without merciful design. A variety of examples are furnished in the Scriptures, not only for warning and reproof, but encouragement and consolation. The substantial identity of human experience in every generation is clearly revealed. Many uninspired biographies are not well calculated to comfort the feeble minded and support the weak. A good man dies, and a too partial friend gathers up all favorable incidents and sends these forth to mankind as a veritable "Memoir." Every deed of charity, every noble act of self-denial, all the painstak-

ing of life is recorded. But seasons of shortcoming, periods of wavering and doubt, grievous falls and days of unfaithfulness, these derelictions are carefully withheld.

The humble but conscientious reader is pointed to a model which discourages rather than inspires. For the reflection is irresistible, that if such biography be reliable, then true piety is attainable only by the few, and the soul that opened the "Memoir" for solace and consolation goes away discomforted, if not in despair. The bruised reed is broken, and the smoking flax is quenched. But can that be a true history which developes the life under phases the most favorable. For does not the soul need to know, for admonition and instruction, not only the good, but also the evil. Nothing short of this is unsuspicious and edifying biography. For the chart of a journey that includes smooth places exclusively, and leaves out the rough, is not only imperfect in outline, but may prove fatally deceptive. If gulfs are to be crossed, if defiles are to be passed, and if here and there the foregoing pil-

grim has fallen and been wounded, the whole truth must be told. A map that comprehends meadow and pasture ground, and omits wilderness and sterile waste, is no inapt illustration of those uninspired biographies, which depict most gloriously the triumphs of grace and pass over in silence the ever-recurring declensions. The Scriptures are honest, and therefore comfort while they warn. The inspired penman tells the whole story. When Abraham obeys God and lays Isaac his only son on the altar, the allegiance is credited, and patriarchal example held up for imitation. But when the father of the faithful prevaricates and deals unfairly with Abimelech, then this transaction too is also minutely recorded. On one page we have Jacob wrestling with an angel and as a prince prevailing with God, but the faithful historian on another faithfully depicts Israel's complaints, when blinded by sorrow, he exclaimed, Joseph is not and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away; all these things are against me. Lot is counted among the worthies, but how particularly and graphically

are described all his melancholy defections and backslidings! At one moment David's fidelity, courage and magnanimity are the subjects of comment, but a faithful revelation does not hesitate, on the other hand, to make bare his occasional impurity and blood-guiltiness. Jehovah Himself is the witness for Job that he was a just man that feared God and eschewed evil, but when an hour of unwonted agony and temptation arrived, there are registered intimations of frailty and imperfection even in the righteous man of Uz. For Job in his disquietude cursed the day wherein he was born. The Master makes the inquiry, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou Simon Bar-jona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven; and I say also unto thee that thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. But it is recorded of this same disciple,

that afterward he denied bitterly, with an oath, the blessed Saviour whom he had so nobly confessed.

And hence the erring but penitent soul feels disburdened when it turns to the sure word of prophecy, from those exaggerated, not to say romantic, accounts of "apples of gold in pictures of silver," histories of a struggle without weariness, battles without scars, and a pilgrimage through pitch and defilement, with garments all white and unsullied. The reader feels that between himself and those heroes of uninspired story there is an impassable gulf, but when the divine record is searched, the personages there are one's own kindred and blood, the veritable descendants of the same common father. And as page after page is perused, the hopes of the believer revive, and "the head is lifted up" at the thought, that saints of all ages endured identical temptations, and stemmed the same floods through which he now passes.

Samson was one of those Titanic men whose physical qualities especially were adapted be-

forehand for a work which needed to be done. He was neither a Moses nor a Paul; for in the orbit of this man there was no room for the expounders of law, and no adequate space for the exercise of those precise gifts intrusted to the Apostle. It must never be forgotten, however, that in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and of earth. Overlooking this fact, the judgments of the world are often hasty and cruel. For is it not clear that the decisions and awards of the last day will be based upon the ground of talent and opportunity? To whom much is given, of him much will be required. And when this rule is righteously applied, then many who are first shall be last, and many again who are last shall be first. For with the powerful temptations incident always to passionate, gigantic, corporeal organizations, it is but fair to conclude, that when every inducement to sin, and all instruments for resistance in each case are impartially weighed, it shall be ascertained in the end, that many a Samson of this world has relatively outstripped in pa-

tience and virtue his more highly reputed neighbor. But it may be asked, Why were so many glaring imperfections permitted to show themselves forth in the life of a believer? To this it can be answered, that the grace of God does not wholly eradicate, but only modifies and subordinates diversities in human character, while we tabernacle here in a hardened and probationary world. Moreover, no insight of man can conjecture the degree of victory which the Holy Ghost in every case of the kind does gain over convulsive appetite and turbulent passion. On the other hand, too, it might be inquired, why does God permit one single soul ordained to eternal life to continue for a day in the love of Satan and the practice of sin? Why are not these chosen ones rescued from the very cradle and thereby delivered from innumerable sorrows and iniquities?

Let it be remembered, however, that in the government and economy of a world, the very vastness and variety of the work indicate beforehand, not only diversity of labor and differences of talent, but also dissimilarity of tem-

perament in the agents to be employed. Every man, according to his several ability. The great Overseer so arranges His forces that nothing can be lost. The laborer who in one place would be inefficient and uncomfortable, is ordered to another, where the gifts that are in him can be exercised, not only to individual well being, but to the profit and edification of others beside. And it sometimes occurs that the man whose labors afterward abound most in the Gospel, was in days that have gone, a ringleader in persecution and the very chief of sinners. The younger son gathers up all and takes his journey into a far country and wastes his substance in riotous living. But when the appointed time arrives, he arises and goes to his father, while the very nakedness and poverty in which he returns, brings up an evil report of the land. Kinsfolk and neighbors anxious to see and eager to hear, encircle the prodigal while he points with powerful energy and constraining pathos to the follies of his youth, and warns the unwary and heedless pilgrim against that far-off country where

famine prevails. He speaks from experience and his words are with power. It is thus that in every department of the vineyard there are examples not only to alarm, but also to encourage.

There is, however, in every community a particular class, the severity of whose judgments are in exact disproportion to the intrinsic excellence of their own gracious attainment. Nor are these censors to be found always among the impious and sceptical. For it was a member of the church who strained at a gnat and swallowed a camel, who devoured widows' houses, and for a pretence made long prayers; while he thanked God publicly that he was not as other men are. It was the Scribe and the Pharisee who built the tombs of the prophets and garnished the sepulchres of the righteous, whilst, as yet, their own garments were reeking with all the martyred blood from Abel to Zacharias. It was the professedly righteous man who paid tithes of anise, mint and cummin, while the weightier matters of law, judgment, mercy and faith were forgotten. It

was an ecclesiastical ruler who flaunted his own righteousness in the face of the Almighty, and at the very foot of the mercy seat vilified the publican. It was to a company of persons who claimed to be wise that the Master addressed those terrible words, Wo! unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for ye are like unto whited sepulchres which, indeed, appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so, ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Blind guides, who shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; who neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Verily, I say unto you that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For ye make clean the outside of the cup and the platter, but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness. Moreover, ye bind heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders, but

ye yourselves will not move them with one of your fingers. For all your works are done to be seen of men. You make broad your phylacteries and enlarge the borders of your garments, and love the uppermost seats at feasts, and chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men Rabbi, Rabbi.

Governments are changed, ecclesiastical forms can be altered, centuries may pass, but the generation of Pharisees never perishes. Wherever society exists the same plausible sect can be found. Cold, money-loving, with a nature too passionless to be overborne by fiery temptation, and a soul too avaricious and sordid to gratify craving, the sleek conventionalist boasts of ostensible well-doing, while inside the heart there are rottenness and corruption. This man is regularly at church, sanctimonious in manner, and in the performance of certain outward obligations rigidly punctilious. Secret sins are atoned for by external conformity. But if a brother is tempted and openly stumbles, the ceremonial professor grows bit-

ter and indignant. Against the dram-drinker, the swearer, the devotee of pleasure, the zeal of this Jehu is preëminently directed. Ought not mankind to be satisfied? This man pays promptly his pew rents, patronizes the preacher, speaks well of religion, casts a mite into the treasury, sits down at the Lord's table, and holds in utter detestation those frailties and backslidings of the passionate and daring, which are patent to the world, and yield no percentage. The sepulchre is well garnished and multitudes are deceived. But must not the patience of every good man be tried when the mask is removed, and the hypocrite appears in his nakedness, oppressing the hireling, and despoiling the poor, heaping up riches by usury, and extorting without scruple gains that are unlawful from the straits of the unfortunate? Noah and Lot were overtaken by drunkenness; David was guilty even of adultery and murder, while a disciple of Jesus denied Him with an oath; but these men afterward repented and were saved. But it is a solemn and significant saying of the Master,

"Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God? It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." Achan, Balaam, Elisha's servant, Dives, Ananias, Sapphira and Judas, these are the unequivocal beacons which indicate inevitably the doom of the covetous.

In our judgment of men we are to be decided not by occasional elevation nor by exceptional declension, but the *habitude* of the soul must be considered. For many a specious superficial time-server builds a reputation for sanctity solely upon detraction. The apparent offences of others are bitterly denounced, while out of the heart of the traducer proceed those invisible but darker trangressions of "evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, and foolishness." The whited walls of a garnished sepulchre mislead the unpracticed and charitable eye, while all inward deadness and corruption are carefully concealed. But the day

fast approaches when these graves shall be rent, and whatever has been done in the secret place will be revealed upon the housetop.

In some natures strength and weakness are strangely associated, For he who, to-day, with undaunted courage faces the deadly cannon, will, with fatal temerity on the morrow, fall into any snare or temptation that Satan may devise. Lust gains the victory easily, and without opposition, where other enemies were fought bravely, and thoroughly conquered. Samson was an over-match for a thousand warlike Philistines, but his great spirit bent like a reed before the enticements of one artful woman. Nor need we wonder so much at this when it is remembered that the bold, the strong, the brave, are generally confiding, while suspicion is a trait of the weak and pusillanimous. He who prides himself upon sharpness, in his pre-judgments of others, indicates a character experimentally bad, and a disposition so morbid, that fear becomes its councillor. For the shadow of every man's spirit, dark or bright, is thrown out upon the

world, and he who is a demoniac himself loves a home among the tombs.

Samson had sins palpable and revolting. He sacrificed honor, conscience, interest, and every object to the gratification of passion. The very strength which God gave him was the occasion of repeated prevarication. Samson was a child of promise and covenant. In the very terms of his birth he was bound to Jehovah. And it was in harmony with these stipulations that the spirit of the Lord began to move him at times in the camp of Dan. God was his shield. Lions roared against him, and he rent them as he would have rent a kid. Enemies conspire, and he smites them hip and thigh with great slaughter. His own brethren bind Samson with cords and deliver him to the Philistines, but he breaks the bands asunder and destroys a thousand men with the jaw-bone of an ass. And now when sore athirst, the same instrument which carried death to an enemy, was made the vehicle of life and restoration to himself. When Samson went down to Gaza, and the Gazites compassed him

in, and laid wait all night to kill him, the spirit of the Lord moved upon the Nazarite, and he arose at midnight, and took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and put them on his shoulders, and carried them up to the top of a hill that is before Hebron. No weapon formed against him prospered. His allegiance, therefore, should have been constant and grateful. But, alas, in an evil hour, Samson took counsel of his lusts. In the very same city where mercy had rescued him, he scandalously backslides, and turns aside to folly. "In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night, behold, there met him a woman with the attire of an harlot and subtile of heart. He goeth after her straightway as an ox goeth to the slaughter, and as a fool to the correction of the stocks."

And it came to pass afterward that Samson loved a heathen woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. He took this maiden to his bosom, but the lords of the Philistines bribed her, and she urged Samson daily so

that he told her all his heart. Then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought money in their hand. And she made him sleep upon her knees; and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him. And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep and said, I will go out as at other times before and shake myself. And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him.

It is true that there was no intrinsic strength in the hair of Samson's head. But those seven locks were a token. They were like the blood on the lintel. Here was the sign and seal of Samson's separation. God looked upon these, and the spirit of the Holy One moved upon the Nazarite. When, however, Samson allowed the symbol to be removed, then the Lord, who was his actual and veritable strength, also departed. The Philistines took him and put out his eyes, and brought him to Gaza, and bound him, and he did grind in the prison.

This was Samson's tribulation hour, the day of humiliation and fiery preparation. For is it not the experience of every Christian, that sooner or later, departures of duty are followed by the rod? The offending member must be cut off and every idol destroyed. As, to the maidens of Persia, designed for the King, there were allotted by law a period of discipline and things for purification, so it is ordained that the inheritors of glory, somewhere in their history, shall undergo trial and be sanctified by suffering, before they go hence, to stand in His presence whose throne is in the heavens. It is an hour of anguish and bitterness, but it is also a season of penitence, confession and growth. The furnace burns fiercely, but only the dross is consumed, while the gold is refined. For whom the Lord loves He chastens. And in the joyful revelations of a glorified state the soul will discover that the precious fruits of immortality were planted amid sorrows and watered with tears. No affliction for the present seemeth to be joyous. The nerves quiver and agonize as the knife

enters the flesh, but the decayed part must be removed, or else the whole body will corrupt. These were needful, indispensable lessons, for Samson to learn, and He who knows the frame, and never afflicts wantonly, appointed for the instruments, blindness, fetters and a prison. The punishment inflicted corresponds to the offence. The roving eye is plucked, and the hand of power made weak, while he who had been, in faithful days, a terror to the Philistines, is now sent conquered and a menial to their prison. Alas! how is the mighty fallen! How is the glory and defence of Israel become the drudge and triumph of the Philistines! Truly all sin, but especially the sin of uncleanness, makes men vile and exposes them to contempt; a wound and dishonor shall he get whose heart is deceived by a woman, and his reproach shall not be wiped away.

But the Lord's mercies are large, and though He chide us for our sins, yet will He not be angry forever. In a little wrath He hides His face, but with everlasting kindness will He return, and have mercy upon His people. When

the soul acknowledges its transgressions, and confesses its sins, then he purges it with hyssop, that it may be clean; He makes the bones that were broken to rejoice; He restores the joys of His salvation, and upholds with His free spirit.

Howbeit as the work of sanctification progressed within, "the hair of Samson's head began to grow again after he was shaven." The dark hours in the prison-house did their precious work steadily and well. For those affections which in proud days had swerved from the Creator, and centered on the creature, were now, in this valley of humiliation, transferred once again to the God of his fathers.

The eventful life of Samson now approaches its tragical termination. It was a day of triumph and jubilation to the Philistines. Their enemy was overcome and captured, and the people rejoiced. For they said, "Our God hath delivered into our hands the destroyer of our country." Then the lords of the Philistines gathered them together for to offer a

great sacrifice to Dagon. It was a high day with these idolaters. Fashion, pride, beauty, rank, assembled to celebrate a signal victory of their god. The place, let us suppose, was a spacious amphitheatre, a building without roof, of a round and oval form, destined for the combats of gladiators or of wild beasts. In the middle was an arena, a large space covered with sand, on which the fights were exhibited. Round about were the vaults or caves in which the animals were kept. Above these was the gallery, from which ascended successive rows of seats, each of greater height and circumference than the preceding. The fourteen first were for the senators and judges; the others for the common people. Philistia on the present occasion did her best. Lords and ladies and the humble multitude poured out in thousands to offer a great oblation. The merry jest went round; friend congratulated friend. The pageant was unusually splendid and gorgeous. Costly array, the glitter of precious stones, and the insignia of royalty helped forward the festive magnificence. In

the midst of mirth and hilarity, they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison-house. The mighty captive, heralded by the lad that held him by the hand, entered the arena. What curiosity, what vain-glory, what jeers and mockery meet the blind hero as he moves cautiously forward! Was ever that bowed and sightless prisoner a terror to Philistines? But Dagon our god has conquered. Where to-day is that Jehovah, in the movings of whose Spirit this judge of Israel trusted? The heart of the multitude was merry, and sacrifice after sacrifice ascended up to Dagon. It was at this moment that Samson said unto the lad that held him by the hand, "Suffer me that I may feel the pillars, whereupon the house standeth, that I may lean upon them. And Samson called unto the Lord, and said, O Lord God! remember me, I pray Thee, and strengthen me, I pray Thee, only this once, O God! that I may be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes. And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and

on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left. And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So that the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.

But after all, it must never be forgotten that Samson's advent into the world was not only divinely pre-arranged, but the very character of the agent so adjusted beforehand as to bring forth and develop a providential aim. For with his mighty exploits were to begin the deliverance of Israel. This man, therefore, is to be judged from the standpoint of original consecration. He was not only a child of promise, but a specific work, in anticipation, had been set apart to his hand. When he found a wife among the heathen, even this was of the Lord. And it was when the Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson that he went down to Ashkelon and slew thirty men. Nor was he guilty of *suicide* in the last act of his

life. Samson was a *public person*. God brought him into the world to be the avenger of the oppressed, and his earnest mind was ever conscious, early and late, of a solemn dispensation. For while liberty and vision were accorded, he fought fearlessly and effectively for his people, and now in conclusion he dies like a patriot, yielding up existence itself as a tribute to his country. He judged Israel twenty years, and if his brethren had not been as selfish and pusillanimous as he was daring and brave, he would have broken forever the yoke of the Philistine.

CHAPTER X.

THE HEBREW CONFESSORS.

"When thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee."—Isaiah liii. 2.

"No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn."—Isaiah liv. 17.

THE very same errors in opinion and doctrine are ever recurring from generation to generation. Unenligtened reason judges, by its own thoughts, the ways of the Eternal. The creature entertains malice and meditates revenge, and hence when Providence allows, either to the individual or families, a visitation of sorrow, the conclusion is positive and obstinate, that guilt lies at the door. One man suffers and another is exempt, because the former sins grievously, while the latter is circumspect and pious. Indeed, there is a theology of

superstition that associates all affliction with crime; and these disciplinary chastisements, which an all-wise and compassionate Father sees needful for correction, are ever confounded with the vindictive scourging of an unappeased judge. When in the island of Melita, a venomous beast came out of the heat and fastened itself on the hand of an apostle, the barbarians said quickly, "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live." The Master in His day rebuked most terribly this ill-founded sentiment. "Suppose ye that those Galileans, whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices, were sinners above all the Galileans because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Every man's life, in some sort, is vicarious. No one liveth to him-

self, and no one dieth to himself. And the sweet savor of the Gospel is often more effectually illustrated in the patience of the saints, during seasons of adversity, than in those exhibitions of joy which accompany prosperity. God covenants with no man to exempt him from trial; but the promise to the faithful is encouraging and precious—My grace shall be sufficient.

It is necessary that, again and again, in the history of the Church, the faith of the believer shall be painfully tried. Nothing but visible examples can silence the gainsayer. Nor has God ever been without such witnesses in the earth. In every age of the world there are a few whose garments are undefiled and who do not bow the knee to Baal. Even in Babylon, the powerful centre of idolatry, a "remnant" was spared. These were chosen vessels of Jehovah, to declare, amid fire and perils, the glory of the Almighty. The time, the place, the occasion were peculiarly auspicious. Nebuchadnezzar had conferred signal favors upon certain captive Israelites. They were

elevated to a position of honor from the condition of vassalage; but now they are commanded to renounce the religion of their fathers, and to fall down and worship the golden image that the king hath set up.

It might be fairly supposed that generous hearts like these were powerfully influenced by a sentiment of gratitude and obligation. In the next place, too, the inhabitants of the great city were very much pleased with the decree of Nebuchadnezzar. Courtiers, princes, governors, as well as the people, were all agreed. These three exiled Hebrews were unsupported by the sympathy of a single kindred heart in that vast concourse, who blindly obeyed the mandate of a despot. Love of approbation in the human soul is an instinctive emotion; but in the case under consideration either conscience must be silenced or the voice of the multitude's approval be sternly disregarded. Nor was this all. There were heavy losses to be sustained in refusing obedience to the monarch's decree. It could hardly be expected that a Chaldean

king would retain in his employ, for a moment, any refractory subject who refused constant and unconditional conformity. Hence office and pecuniary emolument of every description had to be renounced as a matter of necessity. And beyond all this there was the fiery furnace, heated one seven times hotter than it was wont, whose torturing flames awaited the bodies of these insubordinate exiles.

No one can hesitate to surmise the decisions of the time-server in a position so trying. Excuses without number would have crowded on the mind, and conformity, under the circumstances, been unscrupulously regarded as virtuous expediency. Not so, however, with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. It is true that in the reply of these men to their Sovereign there is no bluster nor vainglory. The answer, though calm and courageous, is nevertheless dignified and respectful. They do not dispute the allegiance which is due, in all ordinary cases, from a subject to his lawgiver and ruler; but they contend that when

submission to man is rebellion to God, then the higher obligation must always be paramount. Their response, therefore, was intelligent and conscientious. The consequences of disobedience were well understood, and the form of their answer was carefully digested. But it was a reply of such unexpected firmness and serenity that the king became furious and the form of his visage changed. Let the reader pause and consider for a moment the position of the parties. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, three poor, unfriended, expatriated slaves, stood in the presence of the mightiest despot of the world. For over vast regions of the earth the power of Nebuchadnezzar was altogether unlimited. The king, in his wrath, spoke unto these captives, and said: Is it true, ye do not serve my gods nor worship the golden image which I have set up? Now, if ye be ready to worship, well; but if ye worship not, then ye shall be cast the same hour into a burning fiery furnace. The young men answered: "Be it known unto thee, O king, we will not serve

thy gods nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." Here was a victory of faith at which the unregenerate multitude might well be amazed. The hearts of these confessors were fixed. They steadfastly determined, without regard to consequences, to obey God rather than man. And it is just at this point that false profession and true part company forever. The hypocrite can undergo inspection in the days of prosperity, but when a period of suffering and self-denial arrives, then these spurious disciples turn back and follow the Master no more. On the other hand, however, the man of true faith, in the hour of trial, lays without reservation every earthly possession, and even probationary existence itself, upon the altar of sacrifice. It matters not who, nor what may oppose, the purpose is inflexible. Where duty is indisputably involved, the injunction of a king is no more imperative than the order of a subject. For when the lions roar the beasts of the forest tremble; and when the Lord speaks the kings of the earth must keep silence before

him. Yea, let God be true and every man a liar.

But, where it may be asked, was the providential necessity to visit such terrible punishment upon the heads of those who were youthful and unoffending? Why are the righteous selected as victims, while the wicked were exonerated? Is it not a source of discouragement to the virtuous when the guilty escape and the innocent suffer? To this it can be replied that tribulation answers two ends, which are essentially important:

1. The afflicted soul itself is purified by trial. 2. It is only in the persons and character of its friends, in the hour of adversity and bitter bereavement, that Christianity utters its highest and noblest appeals. Theoretic argument may be questioned and denied, but the practical testimony of a heroic, self-denying life is evidence so conclusive as to awaken the attention of the vilest and most obdurate.

Besides all this, a favorable opportunity had arisen to settle, for all time, a vital and all-im-

portant question. Who is Lord, Beelzebub or Jehovah? It is thought by some that the king of Babylon himself aspired to Divine honors! that he desired all the families of earth to accept him as that "Son of Man" to whom the Jewish people looked forward. Be this as it may, an issue was fairly joined, between Nebuchadnezzar on the one side, who represented Baal, and the three Hebrew youths on the other, who stood up for Jehovah. For the king said, "Who is that God who is able to deliver you out of my hands?" And Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego answered, "Our God, whom we serve, he is able." Here, then, is the controversy. Who is God in Babylon? who is Lord of the whole earth? Who is that "Divine Son" whom the fires cannot harm, and who is strong to deliver? The heralds have cried aloud and commanded the people to fall down and worship the idol. The multitude obey with the exception of three young men who are captives and strangers. And now is Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and his command is urgent.

The mighty men of the army and a countless assembly turn aside to witness and execute the decree of the king. There in the plain of Dura was that image of gold, three score cubits in height and six cubits in breadth. Not far distant is the furnace of fire. The moment is exciting and sublime. In the presence of the king, the princes, governors, captains, judges, treasurers, counsellors, sheriffs and all the rulers of the provinces, and peoples and languages, the most remote and diverse, the great question in dispute is to be speedily settled, and the ordeal is fire. These three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, bound in their coats, their hosen, their hats and other garments, were cast into the flames, and they fell down bound into the midst of the fiery furnace. What a spectacle! What a moment of solemnity and awe! But the raging element was scarcely touched by these pinioned bodies, when Nebuchadnezzar, the king, was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake and said unto his counsellors, Did we not cast three men bound into the midst

of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men, loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt: and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God. Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake and said, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, ye servants of the most high God, come forth and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came forth out of the midst of the fire—upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was a hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed nor the smell of fire had passed on them. Then Nebuchadnezzar spake and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. I make a decree that every people, nation and language which speak anything against this God shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill; because there is no other god that can deliver after this sort. Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

Faith conquers, while darkness is made light, and crooked things straight. On that memorable day the question was gloriously settled that *the Lord He is God;* and the captive Hebrews were heaven's honored instruments. In the morning Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego went forth bound, the contempt and ridicule of an incensed and idolatrous multitude; in the evening they returned the "observed of all observers," victorious over every enemy, and advanced to great honor in the service of the king. And now what man in that vast assembly would not gladly have borne the cross could he only have foreseen the crown? The path that led to the furnace was dreary and dark, but as we look backward, are not the ways of Jehovah gloriously vindicated. For was it not worth the agony of trial, to these stricken hearts, to be the instruments of the Almighty in unfolding to the nations His sovereignty and power? God, in this fallen world, chooses His people in the furnace of affliction, because it is there that the Divinest glory has ever been manifested.

Every affliction, therefore, patiently borne, not only illustrates more clearly the superhuman excellence of faith, but elevates the believer himself, to a blessed fellowship with the Master. For never can a soul enter, submissively, any furnace of trial, that there does not appear quickly at his side "a form like unto the Son of God."

Again in the history of the Babylonish monarchy did God call upon one of His servants to defend that faith "once delivered to the saints." The actors this time were Darius and Daniel. Now it pleased this king to set an hundred and twenty princes which should be over the whole kingdom. And over these, three presidents, of whom Daniel was first; that the princes might give account unto them, and the king should have no damage. Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm. Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom. But they could find

none occasion nor fault, forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him. Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel except we find it against him concerning the law of his God. A conspiracy was forthwith entered into between the presidents, governors, princes, counsellors and captains, who consulted together to establish a royal statute and to make a firm decree, that whosoever asked a petition of any god or man for thirty days, save of the king, should be cast into the den of lions. The decree was established and the writing signed according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not.

And now what shall Daniel do, whose petitions have ascended daily to the God of his fathers? The royal decree having been once enacted, there was no appeal, not even to the king. But does not an easy way of escape present itself readily to the mind of the chief president. It is true that heretofore Daniel had opened his windows toward Jerusalem, and kneeling upon his knees three times

a day prayed and gave thanks before God. But is there any particular form or place essentially connected with the spirit of devotion? Cannot God be worshipped as well in the secluded closet, where no eye but His can see, as in situations more frequented and open to inspection? Is not prayer the soul's sincere desire, unuttered or expressed? And cannot Daniel be just as devout when he cries to God from the heart, as when with windows opened toward Jerusalem he kneeled upon his knees and three times a day prayed and gave thanks? And as a matter of experience, too, are not those groanings which cannot be uttered among the very holiest yearnings of the spirit after purity and God? Then why expose life, with all its great possibilities for good, when the only apparent advantage to be gained is a mere non-essential? Are there not crises in every man's life when expediency is not only lawful but imperative? Daniel was chief of the presidents, and the king thought to set him over the whole realm. Advanced to such a post, how powerful and

effective the influence which a man of large intellect and genuine piety might exert, not only over the people, but upon the princes and courtiers and the monarch himself! Would it not be both prudent and just to disappoint the purposes of wicked conspirators when a plan appears practicable by which the creature's integrity shall be preserved, while there is rendered to the Creator that honor and glory which are due unto His name? If in the effort to retain a particular attitude of devotion, life should be lost, would not the whole realm fall into the hands of wicked rulers, and the interests of true religion be left without a defender at the court of King Darius?

These were potent considerations; but the mind of the prophet was unconvinced and steadfast. For when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house, and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God as he did aforetime. He determined that his fealty to Heaven

should be unequivocal, while consequences of every kind were committed to Him whose power is infinite. The conclusion of Daniel was, no doubt, based in part upon the following considerations: Trust in Jehovah, even in conditions the most unpromising, constitutes an essential element of all true religion. He that is unfaithful in that which is least is unfaithful also in much. Expediency is frequently lawful and sometimes praiseworthy; but this can only be the case when the question is conventional and morally indifferent. Wherever principle enters, even to the smallest degree, from that moment onward the soul is sternly and imperatively divested of option. One choice, and only one, can be made without sin. The claim of the Hebrew in behalf of his faith was exalted and uncompromising, and Daniel well knew that the eyes of the monarch and a countless multitude were upon him. Profession is easy, but trial is the test of truth. A lion's den shall decide for the prophet and his creed. Daniel well understood that feature in unregenerate na-

ture which exacts of the believer a payment of the uttermost farthing on the debt of his religious professions. If the "chief president" ceased to pray in his accustomed way, and at the appointed place, no unseen devotion, however earnest and habitual, would have satisfied the minds of the wicked and sceptical. Daniel and his friends might protest and explain, but the reply of the heathen would have been obstinate and unalterable. The boasting prophet has apostatized. The lion's den was too much for the Christian's faith! He spoke of a God who could deliver him, but in the hour of danger this pious "president" was afraid. And hence had Daniel, in the instance before us, consulted expediency, the cause of Jehovah would have been horribly degraded, not only in Babylon, but throughout an empire whose boundaries were vast.

In the Church of God, and out of it, there is no weapon that Satan wields more efficiently than this doctrine of policy. Even when the path of duty is clearly defined, it happens, alas! too often that professed be-

lievers inquire timidly and sinfully, what will it pay? what are the difficulties to be overcome? are there trials, poverty, reproach or dangers in the way? The soul looks over the field and then disgracefully draws bark. A faith that imposes self-denial and suffering is a religion that the unsanctified heart does not endure. But it has often been ascertained in the end that courage itself was the highest type of expediency; for if we will consider it well, there is no soul, however humble, that can afford to act cowardly in a critical hour; for Jehovah Himself stands by the truth, and the wing of the Almighty shelters the martyr while he fights for the faith. On the other hand, the man that hesitates and halts, walks in a way that seems at the time to be right; but one delusion after another shall follow until retreat becomes impossible, and the end of the whole matter, after all, is destruction without remedy.

Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel and cast him into the den of lions! And a stone was brought and laid

upon the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet. The night came on with its darkness, and Daniel was left by all Babylon to his doom. No man in that great city cared for his soul. He was not alone, however. There was One Presence, no doubt, that filled his mind with meditations solemn and sublime; and of all the places in Chaldea that night the lions' den was the most favored. Angels came down on ministries of mercy, and the hours flew by as on eagles' wings.

Very early in the morning, the king, who had passed the night fasting, arose and came to the den, and cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel. And the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God whom thou servest continually able to deliver thee from the lions? Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live forever; my God hath sent His angel and hath shut the lions' mouth, and they have not hurt me; forasmuch as before Him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, I

have done no hurt. Then the king commanded, and they brought those men which had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions, them, their children and their wives; and the lions had the mastery of them, and brake all their bones in pieces or ever they came at the bottom of the den. Then King Darius wrote unto all people, nations and languages that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied unto you. I make a decree, that in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel; for He is the living God, and steadfast forever, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall be even unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth, and He worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions. So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

1. It here may be seen that fidelity to God, however weighty the opposition, is the only safe "policy" for the good man to adopt.

2. Exalted position is not exempt from its hardships and cares, and he who yearns after prominence and honor must submit without complaint to intermediate discipline.

3. How often does it turn out that the deepest conspiracies which are devised against the innocent are overruled by Providence for the advancement of the persecuted; for when a man's ways please the Lord He makes his enemies to be at peace with him.

4. Let the believer never forget that the keen eye of the world is ever upon him, and that his conduct is especially scrutinized in the season of temptation.

But in the case of Daniel, how glorious was the triumph which true principle obtained. His powerful enemies in the palace were destroyed, while King Darius wrote and proclaimed to all people the "VICTORY OF FAITH."

CHAPTER XI.

NEHEMIAH, THE CHRISTIAN PATRIOT AND THE EARNEST WORKER.

"THERE was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it: Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city."—ECCLE. xiv. 14, 15.

"FOR there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few."—1 SAM. xiv. 6.

WHEN there is a "mind to work" it is impossible to estimate beforehand the good that one single individual can accomplish. Revolutions, either moral or political, when society is broken up, or governments changed, or the laws of thought modified, are commonly attributed in their origin to powerful combinations. No mistake, however, is greater. For not only are the sources of every laudable reformation, but the beginning of all desolating disorders, traceable farther back than the

period of their development. In the closet, or on the rostrum; in the brain of the thinker, or from the lips of the agitator, the idea first came to light. The initiative step was to hide the leaven skillfully, and leave this to do its work. By a majority, for a decade of years or more, the idea may be contemned, but the opinion gains ground in time, until the multitude are convinced, and opposition is removed. It is now that the harvest begins, but the seed, as has been seen, was sown broadly in years that are gone, and the germinating process had been ever steadily progressing. That the case is not overstated let examples be produced.

Not to go back to Confucius, Aristotle, or Mahomet, the reader is referred with confidence to the labors of Martin Luther. It was not at the Diet of Worms that the great Reformation had its origin. The germ of this religious revolution was concocted in the brain of a monk, while he watched, fasted, prayed, read, and did penance on himself in vain, in the Monastery of the Hermits of St. Augustine. It was here that the mind of the reformer

was saddened and alarmed by the ghostly mechanism and morbid asceticism, which was the leading occupation of the lazy drones who buzzed in the convent. The spirit of Luther was aroused, while he studied, agonized, and conversed freely, with Staupitz, the Vicar-General. The final result was peace to his own soul, and a distinct annunciation of the methods by which comfort had been attained, in his ninety-five theses nailed to the door of the castle, and as a grand development of the whole, came the great Reformation.

Look, again, at the history of Methodism. To-day, this denomination numbers its adherents by the million. The voice of its ministers is heard not alone in the refined and cultivated thoroughfares, but the solitary horseman has been seen wending his way, in those frontier and destitute regions, where the bold pioneer builds his humble hut, while he finds no one in this wilderness to care for his soul. The first Methodist society formed in the United States was organized in New York in 1766. But, under the zeal, eloquence and fire of such men

as Coke, Asbury, and Whitefield, their numbers increased rapidly, until, at the present, it would be hardly possible to find a county or neighborhood, on this wide-spread continent, where the "Itinerant" has not gone. Its representatives are found on the sea, on the islands, in heathen lands, among people of all races and languages, "from Greenland's icy mountains to Afric's burning sands." And yet, if we go back an hundred and fifty years and enquire, there is not even a foreshadowing of this powerful denomination. Only at the University of Oxford, there is a private society, consisting of a few young men of congenial piety, whose purity of manners, and fervor of devotion, attracted much attention, These meetings for social prayer and religious converse are held in the chamber of a young man whose consistent integrity and systematic industry were altogether remarkable. In this little assembly not only was there desire for personal improvement, but plans were devised for the enlightenment of the poor. For this purpose the town was divided into districts,

and each member charged himself with an "itinerancy" to comfort the sick, to relieve the destitute, and, above all, to point the soul that was perishing to a Redeemer and Saviour. At first, these students were taunted and abused, but persevering effort and the example of holy living finally overcame prejudice, and disarmed the most captious of every ground of complaint. Here, then, in the chamber, and chiefly in the mind and heart, of JOHN WESLEY, originated that religious awakening whose results can never be estimated, this side of the judgment.

Bunny wrote a little book called "Christian Exercises on Resolution." This volume fell into the hands of Richard Baxter. He read it, and was awakened. Baxter sends forth his "Call to the Unconverted," and it touches the heart of Philip Doddridge. Doddridge writes "Rise and Progress," and a Wilberforce is converted. Wilberforce, disgusted with formalism, publishes his "Practical View." This volume bestirs the heart of a Richmond and Chalmers. Now, again, let the reader go

backward, and trace this stream to its fountain-head, and yonder, in the earnest words of a scarcely remembered Bunny, will be found the germ of awakenings, revivals, ecclesiastical disruptions, and political changes, whose influence has been felt over the civilized world.

Nor need the sluggard contend that these cases are fundamentally exceptional. It is true that to a few men have been committed an extent and measure of influence which are denied to all others. But when one talent only is entrusted, shall this be hidden in a napkin? Must the day of small things be despised? Can we not take God upon trust? Shall not he, however lowly, that goeth forth weeping, sowing precious seed, doubtless come again, bringing his sheaves with him? Wherever there is "a mind to work" the laborer need not wait for genius and large opportunities. Let him begin with "a cup of cold water," and he "that is faithful in the least will soon be made ruler over much." But alas! alas! how much of human existence, that might be usefully expended, is frittered away! For, in

the history of what multitudes, had there been system and courage, that lifetime which is wasted and gone, would have exhibited monuments of excellence and honor, "more lasting than brass." The man of work improves hours and fragments of hours as they pass, while the sluggard throws away weeks, and months, and years, by the wholesale. Finally, let it be clearly understood that commanding abilities are not indispensable to success in those ordinary pursuits, religious or otherwise, which affect, from day to day, continually, the welfare of the race. But if there be diligence in business and fervor of spirit, results will be attained which shall surprise and delight.

NEHEMIAH, whose genealogy is unknown, except that he was the son of Hachaliah and brother of Hanani, occupied the position of cup-bearer, an office of very great honor, in the palace of Shushan, during the reign of Artaxerxes Longimanus. He was a captive Jew, and four hundred and forty-four years before Christ, he learned the mournful and desolate condition of the returned colony, in

his native land. For Hanani and certain men of Judah said unto him, The remnant that are left of the captivity, there in the province, are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof burned with fire. And it came to pass when Nehemiah heard these words he sat down and wept and mourned certain days, and fasted and prayed before the God of Heaven. His heart was filled with such deep and painful concern for his country that his sad countenance attracted the attention of the king. Wherefore the king said unto him: Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? And Nehemiah said: Why should not my countenance be sad when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire! If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favor in thy sight, send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it.

The work, therefore, that this man proposed to himself was the rebuilding of the walls of

Jerusalem. To execute this purpose, however, there were no ordinary obstacles to be overcome. For,

1. When Sanballat, the Horonite, and Tobiah, the Ammonite, heard that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel, it grieved them exceedingly. And when Nehemiah exhorted the Jews, saying: Let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach, then these men, with Geshem, the Arabian, laughed him to scorn. And it came to pass when Sanballat heard that the work was commenced, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews. And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? Will they fortify themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they make an end in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish which are burned? Tobiah, the Ammonite, also tried the power of ridicule, saying, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall. When, therefore, Sanballat and Tobiah and the

Arabians and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the walls of Jerusalem ascended, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth, and conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem and to hinder it, And here it may be noted that subterfuges of every hue and grade easily combine when truth lifts up her standards. Just at this point, too, is revealed that law of affinity, between fallacies the most opposite, which demonstrates the origin, and constitutes the basis, of every false creed. For if in the development of error, opinions diverge, yet, when sound doctrine gains the advantage, and is likely to prevail, the primitive instincts of falsehood immediately revive, and counterfeit beliefs, without distinction of color, fall quickly into line, and unite all their forces in opposition to truth. Those who have quarreled and separated before now hasten to make friends and send gifts to one another. Nehemiah, therefore, has to struggle not only against Sanballat and Tobiah, but a coalition is formed out of the heathen all around, whose

only bond of union was common hatred to the reformer.

2. The nobles of Judah were indifferent, and put not their necks to the work of the Lord. Moreover, these rulers had exacted usury, every one of his neighbor, and there was a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brethren, the Jews, for they said, Lo! we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters, to be servants, and some of our daughters are brought into bondage already; neither is it in our power to redeem them; for other men have our lands and our vineyards. And in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters unto Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came unto them. For there were many in Judah sworn unto him. Hence those persons whose position was influential, and whose sympathy and support should have encouraged, most heartily, the efforts of Nehemiah, were ascertained to be in league and correspondence with an idolatrous Ammonite.

3. Artful diplomacy. When the devil cannot succeed by insolence and boldness, he often

resorts to chicanery and apparent impartiality. And even when a good work is accomplished and complete, he attempts to impair its utility by intimidation and strife. And so it was here; for when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem, the Arabian, and the rest of Nehemiah's enemies heard that he had builded the wall, and that there was no breach left therein, they sent messengers, saying, Come, let us meet together in some of the villages in the plain of Ono. They sent unto Nehemiah four times after this sort. But the artifice failed. Afterward the servant of Sanballat was sent the fifth time with an open letter in his hand, wherein it was written: It is reported among the heathen and Gashmu saith it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel, for which cause thou buildest the wall that thou mayest be thinking according to these words. And thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee in Jerusalem, saying, there is a king in Judah; and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words. Come now, therefore, let us take counsel. Here is a strong appeal

to the fears of Nehemiah, and a perjurer is on hand to make good the accusation. Nothing daunted, however, the Reformer worked on, and the wall was finished in the twenty-and-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-and-two days.

And now having fortified the city, Nehemiah turns his attention more particularly to the religious improvement of the people. That law of the Lord which has been the sword of the spirit and a discerner of the thoughts in all generations, was brought before the congregation, both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding. And Ezra stood upon a pulpit of wood and read therein from the morning until the mid-day. And there under the instrumentality of the word alone, accompanied by the spirit, occurred one of the most remarkable revivals which history records. For seven days the people dwelt in booths, and there was very great gladness; for the joy of the Lord was their strength. Finally a solemn fast is proclaimed, where all the congregation confess their sins

and enter into a curse and into an oath to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all His commandments. Tithes of every description are henceforth to be faithfully offered, from the first fruits of the ground to the first born of their sons. The Sabbath shall be observed, and all intermarriages with the heathen peremptorily forbidden. A plan was also devised by which the offerings of the sanctuary and the maintenance of the priesthood should never be dependent on the caprice of the worshiper. Here then were substantial and tangible signs of a genuine refreshing. And now by what methods such results were accomplished, and that too under difficulties the most imposing, is a question of the profoundest significance to every earnest mind.

1. Nehemiah was a man of noble sympathies and genuine self-denial. For while the position of cup-bearer to Artaxerxes guaranteed to its possessor exemption from want, yet the news of that affliction, which overwhelmed brethren abroad, excited a feeling of the live-

liest concern in the sensitive heart of the king's faithful servant. The portion in his cup could not be sweet while bitter waters were wrung out to his kindred. Nor was this sadness and mourning the evanescent glow of sentimental susceptibility. It was an energetic motion of the soul which resulted in outward intervention. For the resolution is sternly formed to yield up personal comfort and commanding position to cast in his lot with the suffering and oppressed. But Nehemiah began where every good man should always begin, who humbly and honestly desires to succeed. He prayed before the God of heaven, and plead His covenant and mercies. He beseeches the Lord that He would grant him favor in the sight of the king.

2. Nehemiah, though bold and determined, exhibits a wise caution. For there are occasions in life when expediency is not only lawful, but judicious and imperative. Nehemiah wishing, as was proper, to enter on the work under auspices the most favorable, not only applies to the king directly for permission to

depart, but makes application also for letters to the governors beyond the river, that they might convey him over, till he came into Judah; and a letter unto Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, that he might give him timber to make beams for the gates of the palace, and for the wall of the city. Not only did the king grant this, according to the good hand of God, but he also sent captains of the army and horsemen with Nehemiah.

3. A personal inspection of the work to be done. On his arrival in Jerusalem, Nehemiah does not first take counsel of croakers and those birds of evil omen that despicably infest every thoroughfare of life; but with a few congenial spirits, in the deep hour of night, when no intruder could divert, and no spy can report, he visits the broken walls and makes up soberly his estimates.

4. He appeals to the rulers and people, and recounts God's providences toward him. Nehemiah told his people of the hand of God which had been good upon him; as also the king's words, that he had spoken unto him.

And they said let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work.

5. He organizes the forces to be employed. From the High Priest down to the humblest man in the congregation, a position was assigned. And not only were the men engaged, but Shallum, the ruler of half part of Jerusalem, brought his daughter also to help. The people, after their families, with their swords, their spears and their bows came to the work. One half worked and the other half watched. They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other held a weapon. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. But the eye of Nehemiah overlooked all, and he that sounded the trumpet was at his side. So they labored in the work; and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared. And when the night came on, every one lodged with his servant in Jerusalem, to be a guard to their Leader, and that the la-

borer might be close upon his work when the hours of rest were over.

6. Nehemiah is bold in his reproofs, and rebukes injustice and extortion by whomsoever practised. He also causes the usurer to make a covenant of restitution. Nobles are condemned for indolence and evil practices; and a healthful sentiment of rectitude in all things is inculcated throughout the entire congregation. Extravagance in every form is discouraged in the life and habits of the Reformer himself, whose frugal but hospitable board teaches lessons of kindness and economy to the people, more forcible than words. Nehemiah therefore not only proposes a great work, but leads the way in person.

7. The whole congregation are exhorted to contribute of their substance. Even at that early day Nehemiah discovers the advantage of system and regularity in alms-giving, and the "power of the littles." He also detected that disposition in human nature that undervalues every benefit conferred without a price. And it may have been discovered too, there in

Jerusalem, that while here and there a person can be found so wretchedly poor as to be incapable of the smallest benefaction, yet the number of such individuals in any community is smaller by far than has been commonly supposed. For almost every one who practices ordinary diligence, self-denial and foresight can lay aside a mite now and then to help forward the walls of Zion. And still farther, let it be remembered that these offerings of the poor are peculiarly acceptable to the Master. For no act of the New Testament received more honorable mention than the gift of the woman who cast in her two farthings. And they who work in the vineyard, to the smallest extent, become interested at once in the result of the harvest. Moreover, he who is allowed and invited to assist, partakes of the fruits with self-respect and greater satisfaction. Hence that charity is not always to be commended which relieves the sufferer of all individual responsibility and makes him in every thing dependent on bounty; but wise beneficence weighs every case; and while needed help is

furnished to the worthy, yet a plan is devised by which the afflicted and indigent can co-operate efficiently in their own daily support. For any benevolence which ministers to idleness and engenders a habit of subjection deteriorates its recipient, and brings in the end disappointment to the benefactor. And may not missionaries abroad as well as laborers at home learn lessons of wisdom from the policy of Nehemiah? Ought not congregations and the people every where to be educated and invited to give from the start? Would not the heathen themselves be more interested in the gospel if a plan was devised by which their contributions could be secured? With those prejudices which exist in all races of men, are not favors unearned and unsolicited received with suspicion?

There was but a remnant of the captivity, and these were in great affliction and reproach, but all the people had a "mind to work," and success crowned the effort. And so will it ever be, even in the smallest congregation, where idleness is rebuked and every member labors and gives according to ability.

8. Nehemiah foils the wicked plot of Sanballot by the reply, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. And has it not been the experience of good men of all generations, that the best possible answer which can be given to an enemy, is diligence in business and a life above reproach. It is true that proposals for compromise, outwardly fair, will often be made, but the good man foresees the evil and avoids all conferences and complications with the wicked. Nor should he who is engaged about a great work, be deterred by rumors and accusations which originate in the treachery and vileness of some false-swearing Gashmu. In all such cases is not the dignified reply of our Reformer infinitely better? "There are no such things done as thou sayest." Nor should the prospect of danger, imaginary or real, ever intimidate a soul when performing its duty. The righteous man must not be afraid of evil tidings. And hence to the advice of Shemaiah, Nehemiah nobly responds: "Should such a man as I flee. And who is there that being as I am would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in!"

For Nehemiah knew full well that any manifestation of timidity on the part of the Chief would lead to instant demoralization in the ranks of his followers.

9. But finally and mainly, from first to last, this Christian Patriot and Reformer asked strength and guidance from on high. In all his ways he acknowledged God, and as a consequence his steps were ordered by the Lord, and no weapon formed against him prospered. And so will it ever be in the history of those who have a "mind to work." The very feeblest laborer may go forth with confidence to his task, provided the everlasting arm be underneath. For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears open unto their cries. All, it is true, cannot do the work of Nehemiah, but he who does "what he can" will be welcomed at last with that blessed plaudit: Well done thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.

CHAPTER XII.

PAUL AND SILAS, THE PRISONERS.

"God my Maker who giveth songs in the night.."—Job xxxv. 10.

PAUL and Silas while abiding certain days at Philippi, in fulfillment of their mission, cast out from a certain damsel a spirit of divination. For this cause the multitude rose up together against them, and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely, who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. The hour was midnight, the place a dungeon, the instruments of torture, "stripes" and "stocks," while the victims themselves

were the commissioned ambassadors of earth's rightful King! How remarkable the spectacle, how mysterious the providence, how gloomy the prospect! How the hopes of the timid and vacillating would have perished! On the other hand, however, Paul and Silas, with bodies all lacerated, with feet made fast in the stocks, prayed and sang praises to God. Their souls, even in this gloomy abode, were lifted into those regions of peace where no fetters can bind and no darkness becloud. These men were resigned and triumphant, because they believed in a divine Providence, and that sooner or later the purposes of God would be gloriously unfolded. Paul and Silas possessed a clear conscience, and had simply done their duty. It was a privilege to be assimilated to Jesus even in the matter of suffering. They knew also that deliverance at any time was possible with God, and that redemption would not be delayed for a moment when the plans of Jehovah were fully subserved. In any event it was pleasant to know that the present affliction could be counted among "the all things"

which work together "for good" to them that "love God." Nor did such precious faith remain long unrewarded; for suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken, and immediately all the doors were opened and every man's bands were loosed.

God hears His chosen when they cry, and He delivers them in some form, whether the agencies applied to this end are accustomed and secondary, or else direct, unwonted and superhuman. This season of trial, too, let it ever be remembered, is a seed-time most precious to the soul that endures. Moreover, in this furnace of affliction the disciple can demonstrate effectually the excellence, power and consolations of faith. Paul and Silas improved the opportunity. They did not hasten to escape, but abided in the prison walls, and preached Christ to the trembling and terrified jailer. A path that promises least in the beginnng, often leads at the last to consequences the most delightful. "Sorrow endures for a night, but joy comes in the morning." True

piety delivers its possessor from hurry, and raises him above every fear of the creature. Paul and Silas, though smarting with stripes, remained quiet in the prison, and not only was the jailer converted, but the magistrates, who had beaten them openly and uncondemned, were compelled to appear and beseech them, and bring them out and desire them to depart. Christian boldness was triumphant. But thus has it ever been in the lives of Christ's brave-hearted followers. The determined impulse of every pious soul sternly refuses all favors that are unjust and dishonorable. And this holy independence not only insures the approval of Heaven, but commands in the end the unsolicited respect even of an enemy.

But, alas! how often have unguarded believers mistaken darkness and present distress for an indubitable sign of divine disapprobation and spiritual desertion! By such persons as these the mercies of God can only be deciphered in the sunlight of prosperity. But let the reader prayerfully ponder the doings of God in that prison of Philippi. In the path of duty and

providential appointment, afflictions the most appalling overtook those disciples. For at Troas a vision appeared to Paul, and there stood a man of Macedonia, saying, come over and help us. And it was in obedience to this heavenly call that Paul and Silas visited Philippi.

But the tribulations of Paul and Silas were also representative, and intended for our consolation and instruction, whose lot is cast in these "ends of the world." The discipline, though costly and painful to them, is definite, inspiriting and precious to us. Man's limbs may be manacled, but the grace of God cannot be bound. The religions of this world seek for happiness in wealth, fashion, lust and power. All the sources of their pleasure are without. When the earthly idol perishes, as sooner or later it must, then the children of this generation are stung with despair. Nothing remains but an embittered present and a foreboding future. In dungeons, poverty, distress and adversity, no comfort can be found. But the world may journey as it chooses, and

still the believer is independent. He has provisions of which the ungodly know nothing. For the sources of his joy are within. His life is hid with Christ in God, and though his outward man perishes, the inward man is renewed day by day. The fountain from which he draws is deep and perennial. It is a well of water springing up unto everlasting life. The world and the things of the world cannot seriously vex, for the world, as a portion, has been sincerely renounced. To live, is Christ; to die, gain. Between the man and his treasures, separation is impossible. Neither place nor condition, therefore, can affect a religion that glows and triumphs in the soul.

Here then is the great lesson which has been taught in the jail at Philippi. The faith of God's witnesses lays hold of the unseen and eternal. All else is subsidiary and subordinate. When trials come they can not only be endured without complaint, but, in the light of God's providence and word, be accepted even joyfully. For what, after all, is the furnace of trial but the destruction of dross and the

refinement of gold? Paul gave up all that he once counted dear, but never before was earth so beautiful, never before had life been so pleasant. Although Heaven was almost in view, and to die would be gain, yet existence is so ennobled and comforted by grace, the Apostle is willing, amid all his tribulations, to labor on here, and be spent for the Master. When the church or any of her members ascends to that measure of faith that distinguished these prisoners, then all fear of the creature can be firmly dismissed. For the promises of God bloom freshly along the whole pathway of duty. The man who does right can never be forsaken. To the security of the faithful, every attribute of Jehovah stands irrevocably pledged! The songs of Paul and Silas in the prison, therefore, were in exact accordance with the profoundest teachings of true Christian philosophy.

CHAPTER XIII.

STEPHEN, THE MARTYR

"Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness."—Ps. cxii. 4.
"Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: The remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain."—Ps. lxxi. 10.
"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."—Ps. cxvi. 15.

IN the economy of grace, the means and the end appear altogether disproportioned. The learned Greek or haughty Roman would have ridiculed the thought that any religion could succeed, whose author, on the one hand, was convicted and crucified, while its living advocates, on the other, were illiterate fishermen and disreputable publicans! How can such instruments as these contend successfully against dogmatic tradition and prejudice at home, while everywhere abroad there are centuries of ignorance and superstitions in-

numerable to be fought and overcome? To all human likelihood the prospect ahead appeared cheerless and unpromising. And yet the word of God grew, and disciples were multiplied. The doctrine was like "the fire and a hammer." And the same peculiarity of working which distinguished the Providence of God in those primitive days, has often been illustrated, in succeeding generations. Earthly vessels, and apparently weak ones, are chosen, that the power may be seen to be of God, and not of man. No human mind can judge of final results by ostensible means; and let it never be forgotten that whenever truth is at stake, the Omnipotent arm is engaged to work powerfully, though silently, in the background. And when God raises up instruments and then cuts them off, there may be ground for humility but not for despair. On the day of the crucifixion the powers of darkness appeared to be victorious, and the friends of the Saviour were greatly discouraged; but in the revelation of God's wonderful purpose, that faith which was sorrowful, bruised and almost in despair at the

cross, gathered from its dread agonies elasticity in the end, while the very methods adopted to weaken, extinguish, and degrade, became to the Christian, in the ages that followed, a symbol of strength, and the sign of true glory. And when the Master was gone and bloody persecution arose, every effort of Satan to abate and destroy was overruled of God for the security of believers and the dissemination of truth. For while the little band at Jerusalem was broken and dispersed, yet they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word. Stephen was stoned, but Philip visited Samaria and proclaimed Christ as a Saviour.

Nor need the Christian fear, if the calls of duty lead him down through the valley. Let him go forward bravely, for how much nobler it is to die like a hero than to live like a craven! God clothes the martyr with peculiar honor. For Stephen saw heaven open, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

True Christianity elevates its votaries above the petty and bitter animosities of this self-

seeking world. The example of Jesus is ennobling and grand. In some respects, it is true, Christ is inimitable. The disciple, like the Master, cannot change water into wine, neither can he feed thousands miraculously, nor raise the dead, nor forgive sin. But after His example, and according to ability, we can visit the sick, clothe the naked, relieve the hungry, and comfort the afflicted. If persecutions come, we can endure; if an enemy thirsts, we can give him drink. We can make to ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness. The true child of God can reject and despise the opinions of this world when they conflict with principle. He can sow good seed beside all waters. He can defy falsehood, however combined and supported. He can imitate Stephen, who in the very midst of missiles and death, exclaimed from the heart, Lord Jesus lay not this sin to their charge.

And what encouragement do we find, in this narrative, to prayer? Stephen prayed for his murderers, and God answers the supplication in the conversion of Saul, the very chief of the

persecutors. Heaven loves and records every act of self-denial and true heroism. Prayer is the soul's burden, laid submissively at the feet of Christ. Groanings which cannot be uttered often accompany it. But we may expect an answer in some form to that petition which costs us a sacrifice. For when lust and pride and self are crucified, then, if the specific request is not granted, ministering spirits are at hand to sooth the disquieted soul, while the love of God, shed abroad in the heart, becomes a strong consolation. We also learn, still farther, that if a believer lives up to his duty in the midst of temptation and trial, he will ordinarily find Christ waiting for him with much peace at the end of the journey. They, therefore, who would die well, must learn beforehand to live well. And then in the hour of death, and ere the spirit shall be parted from the body, there may be wonderful revelations of that life which is to come. For Stephen saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And other saints, beside, have no doubt been surprised and enraptured at the

visions of glory which the spirit has revealed. For precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.

And who, that reads this history of a dying martyr, can question for a moment the divinity of our Lord? While in the words, *Lord Jesus receive my spirit*, materialism perishes, and life and immortality are brought to light. Blessed thought! the dying saint can view the promised rest from a pillow of suffering and decay. Heaven is not far away. Its gates are open to the pure in heart, while the angels of God descend to comfort and convoy the departing confessor. The body is carried out to burial, but the soul goes straightly up, to be with Christ. There is no long interval of gloom in the grave, but every dying believer can be comforted by those words of the Master to a penitent thief—*this day shalt thou be with me in paradise.* In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the cold floods of death are passed, and the soul is forever in His presence, where is fullness of joy, and at Whose right hand there are pleasures forever-more.

CHAPTER XIV.

TRUTH VERSUS THE SWORD.

"Is not my word like as fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?"—ISAIAH xxiii. 29.

"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strongholds."—2 COR. x. 4.

TWO great antagonistic influences have been at work in our world from the beginning. Wherever one is present, the other is hard by. From the day of the temptation in the garden, and the subsequent martyrdom of Abel, individuals, communities and nations have been furnished with ever-recurring illustrations of this terrible conflict. And not only does the battle between virtue and vice rage fiercely without, but there is also melancholy evidence within, even to the upright, that when he would do good, evil is present with

him. And falsehood, at the first view, appears to be the stronger, and to possess the advantage. If Christianity points confidently to her humble beginnings, and the obstacles to be overcome, so, on the other hand, may religions that oppose. Look at Mohammedanism. Its author was a poor, unlettered Arab. He had prejudices to overcome, disciples to make, armies to organize, money to raise, and violent opposition to overcome. But he succeeded. His genius was superior to difficulties, and giant kingdoms of the Oriental and Occidental world yielded obedience to his sceptre, and credence to his doctrine. Consider once more: There is papacy and the true church. The former had its birth amid apostacy and darkness, and yet the victories of this cruel superstition were resistless and appalling. For centuries its supremacy was absolute. It marshaled armies, fought battles, dictated law, originated creeds, held inquisitions, and consumed unquestioned any who withstood. The weapons of falsehood again seem to be triumphant. And, for the most part, as it appears to

the superficial thinker, the captains and great ones of earth have wielded the sword, with no other purpose or result than individual aggrandisement. For did not Nebuchadnezzar conquer and build for himself? Did not Pharaoh say, Who is the Lord, that I shall obey Him? Did not Herod behead John the Baptist without obstruction or protest? And was it not the Roman spear which drank the blood of Christ? Do not the Alexanders, Cæsars, and Napoleons appear to govern the nations, simply with a view to individual exaltation and personal advantage? Where, then, is the oft-repeated boast that God reigns; that He works His will in the armies of Heaven and among the inhabitants of earth, and that none can stay His hand, or say unto Him what doest Thou? Are not the enumerated "Victories of Faith" inconclusive after all? For if success be accepted in one case as the criterion of truth, the same rule of judgment cannot be rejected in another.

But these objections of the sceptic, plausible as they seem, are vain, insufficient, and alto-

gether deceptive. It is true that Pharaoh oppresses the Hebrew, but a bound had been appointed which the king could not pass. Nebuchadnezzar ascends the greatest throne of the East, but, when God's purposes demand it, the monarch is degraded and his reason departs. Alexander organizes an army to conquer the world, but the Almighty subordinates the genius of the victor to strictly providential ends. The Jew betrays and crucifies Christ, not surely because error is greater than truth, but the Son of Man went, as it was determined beforehand, in the counsels of Eternity. Nor was the darkness and cruelty of the middle ages a victory of wrong over right; but the people who did not like to retain God in their knowledge were judicially blinded. The French revolution and all kindred revolutions were not a triumph of human over power divine. But in every instance truth presided at the carnival and pinioned the victims. For incestuous marriage between civil governments and bloody ecclesiastical power begets a nondescript which thirsts for the life of its own

guilty parents. Nor is it any answer to this, that righteous persons and nations suffer and are brought low. For none are without sin, and if discipline is needed, God sovereignly applies it. And of this method no one need complain. For if God burns the dwelling of a good man over his head, it may be to save from destruction both body and soul. If Job and Jacob, and such as these, are bereaved, God honors the sufferer, whilst an inspiriting example is offered to others.

Under certain conditions success is a criterion of truth. And it is here that the faith of the Christian occupies a vantage ground which should never be surrendered. For, to refer to Mohammedanism again, the prophet of Mecca, as can be demonstrated most clearly, was possessed of frailties and guilty of misbehavior, for which satisfactory excuse has never been elicited. The very creed of this man was a concession. It questioned fallen nature and provided for its loves—lust, pomp, pride, and power. If any join this standard, then the harvest of earth is his. If he falls by the way, heaven, with

gardens, and groves, and feasts, and houris are before him. Greed and appetite shall be gratified. Man has only to be what he is, and to be it intensely, and the Almighty is content. It was thus that the son of Abdallah prophesied, and it was through expedients so impure and offensive that his cause gained adherents and prospered. The belief which he proclaimed was the very word for which the great sinful multitude had yearned through the ages.

In contrast with this, let the life, doctrine and measures of Jesus Christ be deeply pondered. From the beginning to the very close, no guile was found on His lips. He resorted to no chicanery, borrowed no money, enlisted no soldiers, and ever pointed, without challenge, to the purity of His creed and the perfect transparency of His works. He spake nothing in secret, while in the gospel which He preached there was not a syllable of concession. It confronted human nature in its vileness, and, sharper than the two-edged sword, it pierced to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit. It stood over the proud, and dictated

humility. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, the pride of life; all sinful habits, perverse dispositions, secret sins, living unto self—these were straightly separated, bound, and cut off. The work of Mohammedanism was to roll a stone downhill; the task of Christianity is to take a mighty burden from the valley and bear it to the mountain-top. The creed of Mahomet was a premium on lust; the religion of Jesus is war to the death with every evil affection. Mohammedanism was defiant, and delighted in revenge; Christianity is humble, and proclaims peace to the nations. Mohammedanism was stern and relentless to foes; Christianity enjoins the forgiveness of enemies and the exercise of charity. Mohammedanism imposed no restraints and offered visible compensations; Christianity demands self-denial and adjourns her rewards. Mohammedanism accepted humanity as capable and unfallen, and flattered the creature; Christianity unfolds human guilt and inability, and brings down authoritatively the lofty looks of man. A sword and external

allegiance were all that Mahomet demanded, while the condition of acceptance in the family of Christ is inward renewal and the destruction of every carnal weapon. The religion of the Arab could succeed through earthly devices simply, while the faith of the Galilean requires an ever-present Divinity.

It was under such auspices as these that Christianity arose and succeeded; while, on the other hand, Mohammedanism sprang up amid human corruptions like a pestilential disease from the accumulated filth of an uncleansed city. Truth often seems to move slowly; but her reprisals, in the end, are distinctive and sure. Earthly avengers, as it appears on the outside, follow out closely individual devices; but a Messenger stronger than these modifies the plan and alters widely the results. For God's Word is the power, and the sword is the instrument; and wherever giant or hoar superstitions culminate, there the truth sits in judgment and vindicates its authority. The hour may be delayed, but at the appointed time the "thrones are

set" and all falsehoods shall be arraigned. On the one side will be Baal and his prophets; and, on the other, Jehovah and His.

The difference between carnal weapons and the Word of God may be still farther illustrated. The sword cuts the flesh, drinks the blood, and its work is done; but the Word of God is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. The arena of one is physical, the sphere of the other is immaterial. The Gospel bestirs man at the fountain head. It convicts, it converts, it makes alive, it comforts. While the preacher reasons of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come, the transgressor trembles; and hence whenever the truth is bravely preached, it compels obedience or stirs up wrath. The Gospel is never inoperative. It kills or makes alive. The Divine perfections, man's relations and obligations; the law, its spirituality, extent and excellence, the sinner's guilt and danger—these the Word of God forces on the conscience, and the soul either submits, believes and repents, or else makes a mock of sin and

perishes. When, therefore, we consider Christianity in its nature and origin, in the instruments and weapons it employs, in the obstacles to be overcome, and these, in connection with the character of those victories she has gained; in all the multiplied forms of counterfeit unbelief, there never can be found even a proximate parallel. Human governments, through the sword, may endure for a while, but eventually that "stone cut without hands out of the mountain shall smite these images of clay and break them to pieces."

CHAPTER XV.

GOD IN HISTORY.

"For the kingdom is the Lord's, and He is Governor among the nations."—Psalm xxii. 28.

THE Apostle, in his Epistle to the Corinthians, uses the following remarkable language: "All things are yours; whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours." The Divine purpose, in the redemption of the saints, has embraced and made ancillary, not only individuals and communities, but it comprehends in its plans those kingdoms of the world whose histories are intimately connected with the origin and progress of art, literature, science and the

triumphs of war. It is impossible, however, for the creature to estimate in advance the designs of Jehovah. The day is often dark and chaotic, as the human eye beholds it, in the very hour when the forces of truth are mustering to battle. Men see not yet the "bright light that is behind the cloud—the winds must first pass and cleanse them." The Almighty lays the beams of his chambers in the waters, and

> "Deep in unfathomable mines
> Of never-failing skill,
> He treasures up his bright designs
> And works His sovereign will."

Nevertheless, all things work together for good to them that love God. However transcendant the kingdom, however powerful the enemy, the Lord will reveal it in his time, that all has been subordinate to this end. Does the reader ask for examples? They can be readily furnished. Consider, for a season, certain pre-existing governments in their relations to Christianity and faith. Let us sup-

pose that an inquisitive traveler had visited the court of Pharaoh in the day of Egypt's power and glory, just previous to the exodus. He is a guest of the monarch, and special pains are taken to exhibit the kingdom in its wonderful magnificence, from the sovereign on his throne down to the meat on his table, and the sittings of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, together with the pride, pomp and circumstance which always attended this illustrious dynasty. Having satisfied curiosity within, he goes forth from the palace to behold a "diverse nation," a people oppressed, overtasked and beaten by cruel officers and exacting overseers. These afflicted ones are the posterity of Jacob. And now as the enterprising tourist gazes backward upon the ease and magnificence of Pharoah's house, and outward upon the scene of tyranny and injustice, the information would have been strange, indeed, that the favorites of heaven were not the dwellers in those halls of splendor, but that they must be sought in these groaning and overburdened exiles. And

yet the mind of the thoughtful and pious observer should not have been staggered even at such a communication as this. For is it not the glory of God to conceal a thing? Are not His deepest plans of love and mercy germinated in unfathomable mines? Hath not God, all through the ages, chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the things that are mighty, and base things of the world and things which are despised, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are? Does He not every day lead the blind by ways they know not? And could aught else be expected of Him with whom a thousand years are as a day?

But, after all, what is one generation and its sorrows in contrast with those great principles which are the legitimate outgrowth of sanctified tribulation and trial? What were the four hundred and thirty years of expatriation and oppression, added to the whole wilderness journey and its afflictions, when compared with that educational gain which disciplined and enlightened the Hebrew, and

prepared him to become the receptacle of God's oracles; whilst to this nation "pertained the adoption and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the law and the service of God and the promises, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever?" But while God is working incomprehensibly to mortal eye, no pure-minded sufferer need be without comfort; for to the upright there ariseth a light in the darkness, and compensations are ever provided for those who have the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit.

As we look back upon Pharaoh and his temporal greatness, and then consider the Israelite, not alone in his distress, but also in his spiritual privileges, it will not be difficult to decide upon the post of true honor. To the king, we admit, there belonged the wealth, the fashion and glitter of this evil world; but these all perish in the using. What a glorious list of immunities, however, encompassed the Hebrew, from his exodus onward, till the coming of Shiloh. The smitten rock followed

him, and there, too, were the pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night. We might linger for a season, also, at the Red Sea and at Sinai for illustrations of Divine power and beneficence, and then pass over to the land of promise, with its long list of prophets, martyrs, heroes, of whom the world was not worthy. Before all these spiritual benefits and heavenly blessings, how insignificant the glory of Pharaoh's kingdom! It is true that the Hebrew could not foresee, in its gracious fullness the magnitude of these mercies; and yet his way was, by no means, completely enveloped in uncertainty. For there was one man of the nation whose faith overleaped every intermediate barrier, and gave present subsistence to future realities. Moses foresaw, even amid "the reproach of Christ," those riches which are greater by far than the treasures of Egypt; and had every Israelite risen to the height of this great argument, sorrow would have hung lightly on the spirit, while not a bone should have bleached in the wilderness, and not a murmur ascended, but the whole pilgrimage

been marked by inward exultation and outward victory.

The Church of God, sooner or later, must study the great lesson that visible prosperity is no certain indication of Divine approbation; that no man's life consists in the abundance that he possesses, and that the channels of true joy are often hidden and deep. The world, the flesh and the Devil are three sturdy robbers; but these all combined cannot despoil of its manhood the soul that is determined. For the grace of God is so bound up in the believer's life, that, while Christ lives, the believer must live also. It was no accident that the children of Abraham were bondmen in Egypt, and it was by Divine appointment that Pharaoh came to the throne at this time, "to the intent that the living might know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will, and setteth up over it the basest of men."

Desperate, again, seemed the condition of the Israelites, when, by the rivers of Babylon, they sat down and wept, hanging their harps

upon the willows, whilst they that carried them away captive required a song, saying, in mockery, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion."

But was there no intercessor to plead the cause of the oppressed with that mighty despot as he walked in the palace of the kingdom and said, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power and for the honor of my majesty?" History shall answer. While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; the kingdom is departed from thee, and they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field; they shall make thee eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee until thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men and giveth it to whomsoever He will. The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar, and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of

heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws. On the other hand, neither a lion's den nor the burning furnace can harm a disciple whose faith remains steadfast amid the terrible threats of a persecuting monarch.

A majority of these Hebrews, however, were in captivity on account of idolatry, and God allowed the king of Babylon for a day, simply as His instrument, to chastize a backslidden people. But in the instance before us, as in all others, the blessed truth comes to light in the end, that he whose life is hid with Christ in God need not be dependent on season or place for spiritual assurance and rich consolation.

"While blessed with a sense of his love,
A palace a toy can appear,
And prisons shall palaces prove
If Jesus will dwell with us there."

We also learn the great lesson, that he who trusts in his own heart is a fool. Let no individual or nation be inflated by success, for He

that sitteth in the heavens will bring down all high looks, and the avenger of to-day may become the victim of to-morrow. Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

The next great monarchy was the Medo-Persian. At the head of this was Cyrus. And what does inspired history say of this man? "Thus saith the Lord to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings to open before him the two-leaved gates, and the gates shall not be shut. I will go before thee and make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of brass and cut in sunder the bars of iron; and I will give thee the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the Lord, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. For Jacob my servant's sake and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name; I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me. I am the Lord and there is none

else, there is no God besides me; I girded thee though thou hast not known me. That they may know from the rising of the sun and from the west that there is none besides me. I am the Lord and there is none else. I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create evil; I the Lord do all these things."

Cyrus was no doubt a follower of Zoroaster. The leading doctrine of this religion was a belief in a good and evil principle, the sources of all good and ill. This system asserted the existence of a kingdom of light and a kingdom of darkness. Over each of these reigned a divine sovereign. These co-ordinate and eternal beings were in continual opposition to each other; and from this contest originate that mixture and interchange of good and evil which prevail on the earth. In opposition to this opinion, Jehovah declares to Cyrus that both light and darkness, good and evil, are His creatures: there is no being in the universe independent of Him; all are His creatures and instruments, either acting at His command or

by His permission. God is positively the author of all that is true, holy, good or happy in the universe; and evil, error and misery came into the world by His permission, through the willful apostacy of His creatures; but are so restrained and overruled by Him as to concur in fulfilling His wise and righteous purposes; and cannot possibly exceed the bounds He assigns them, or defeat any of His plans, or create any disquietude or disappointment.

Cyrus, then, was ordained of God and anointed to subdue nations, and the Almighty went before him to loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two-leaved gates, to make crooked things straight, to break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron. And all this was done "for Jacob, His servant's sake, and for Israel His elect."

Turning to the Greco-Macedonian Empire, what do we behold? A warrior of wonderful genius, with armies marshaled and eager for the conflict. Daniel the prophet thus describes him: "After this I beheld and lo! another like a leopard, which had upon the back of it four

wings of a fowl; the beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it. And I saw him come close unto the ram, and he was moved with choler against him, and smote the ram, and broke his two horns, and there was no power in the ram to stand before him, but he cast him down to the ground and stamped upon him, and there was none that could deliver the ram out of his hand. Therefore the he-goat waxed very great. This military chieftain was no respecter of nations, but goaded on by ambition, it was his purpose to make every kingdom tributary, from the Hellespont to India. Jerusalem lay in his march, but God shielded the Holy City. Jehovah went with Alexander and before him; and the sight of those consecrated men who ministered in the Holy Place, where stood the symbol of God's gracious presence with the Jewish people, overawed the young hero, and he desisted for a season from his work of destruction.

For a long period Greece had been the cradle of poetry, art, science and philosopy. Her language had acquired a wealth and versatility

that no other tongue could boast. The Hebrew vernacular was grand, but it wanted that flexibility and variety which were needed to express those nicer shades of thought designed for the New Testament. It was eminently adapted to a people who were commanded to separate themselves from the surrounding nations. But the days of Messiah approached, and the middle wall of partition had to be broken down. For Jesus Christ was to be the power of God, not alone to the Jew, but also to the Gentile. Hence the language of the gospel was prepared and perfected in the far-famed schools of Sparta and Athens. And now, when the day for its dissemination arrives, Alexander goes forth in the twofold office of avenger and teacher. For the scholar is his companion, and every where by the way when the victory has been won, he inaugurates the academy; the first and only military hero who ever employed the schoolmaster in conjunction with the sword. The divine purpose again having been accomplished, through the prowess of this man, Alexander passes from the stage

Another Empire arises. Its rulers and people know not God. The declared purpose of this fifth great monarchy is universal dominion. The Roman power must encircle the combined kingdoms of Alexander, Cyrus, Nebuchadnezzar and Pharaoh. At the battle of Latium, just thirty years before Christ, these efforts were crowned with success. And is not the hand of God discoverable here? Go to Tarsus and behold a young man whose genius and aspirations are sufficient to attract the attention and excite the pride of this or any other city. And who was Saul but a Roman citizen, brought up at the feet of a Jewish doctor, but deeply learned also in the lore of classic lands? Now in the very beginning the gospel needed an open field, and a missionary too who could explore it fully, without "let or hinderance." But to a Roman citizen every barrier was broken down from the Ganges to Spain, and from the Hebrides to Alexandria. For over all these lands now waved triumphantly the Roman eagles. Sectionalism, local prejudice, difficulty of ingress and egress gave

way in turn to admiration of the great military glory, which found its centre in the Seven Hilled City. The Roman Legion therefore was God's instrument in preparing the way for the Apostolic Messenger.

It is true that the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing; the kings of the earth set themselves and the Rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed, saying, let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cords from us! It is true that the princes and governors of this world work for aggrandizement, and if Christ's kingdom stand in the way, they seek to trample it in their fury. But "He that sitteth in the heavens will laugh, the Lord shall have them in derision." The Church and the salvation of believers is the central idea in the mind of Jehovah as He metes out His dispensations to governments and communities, in this sin-stricken earth. Indeed from the beginning it was the purpose of Jehovah to make this earth the arena on which He should manifest the attribute of mercy in the redemption

of a chosen people. Every event of past history, as before intimated, if properly considered, points to this end as surely as the needle to the pole; and every development in the great drama that is to come, from the falling sparrow to extinguished nationalities, shall only swell the movement toward this sublime consummation. In the mean time the poles of divine Providence may so far separate as to be undistinguishable to reason's eye, but the attraction still exists, and if the senses fail, then is the time for faith. For the foundation once admitted, that Christ is Head over all things to the Church, the believer should never be staggered even when clouds and darkness veil the Almighty. For if the present be dim and overcast, let him refer to the past, and what is better still, look forward to a future, which God's oath is pledged to make luminous. Hence faith need never lack for material; for all history, as well as the experience of every deeply pious soul demonstrate the fact that the Almighty Father is often found working grandly and gloriously for His church and people, even

when thick clouds are His garment. With many, however, impatience takes the place of submission and trust. Men will not consider that there is first "the blade and then the ear, and after that the full corn in the ear." To certain carping disciples we might, with propriety, address the language of the Apostle when he wrote to the Corinthians: Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die. If the truth is sown in dishonor, God can raise it in glory. Let it suffice us to know that in a righteous economy no good seed is ever lost. Deep and dark may be the mould which covers the truth, but the Omnipotent eye keeps watch, and the sure years shall reveal the wisdom that underlies every delay. And when a revelation does come, it shall be seen that darkness has its uses as well as the light. God was not idle, neither did the truth lose any of its vitality. The only anxious care, therefore, that is allowable to the Christian is that which relates to individual duty. Let him sow beside all waters, whether there be

wind or cloud or sunshine. We may fail in our part, but God never can in His.

> "Sure as Thy truth shall last,
> To Zion shall be given
> The brightest glories earth can yield,
> And brighter bliss in Heaven."

"I saw in the night-visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shal not be destroyed."

CHAPTER XVI.

LOT'S WIFE, THE LINGERER.

"WHATSOEVER thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."—PROV. ix. 10.

GOD reigns. Let the careless reader, therefore, take warning. For if the dealings of the Almighty with individuals and nations that fear Him are long-suffering and gracious, it is equally true that the enemies of the Lord shall perish by the way when His wrath is kindled but a little. God's mercies are large, but his forbearance will not continue forever. Let no one presume; for destruction may overtake the loiterer at last, in the very moment, of all others, when danger is unsuspected, and escape appears probable.

In exemplification of this the history of Lot's wife is solemn and significant.

Sodom was a city of the East, and chief of the five cities of the plain. In many respects, no doubt, it resembled the cities of the present day. Its inhabitants appeared to be intent on the very same objects. For they ate and drank, bought and sold, planted and builded. The thoughts of the people were occupied, for the most part, if not altogether, with worldly and transitory concerns. Dissipation and debauchery, in every form, were prevalent. The epicure, the drunkard, the adulterer, the abusers of themselves with mankind, each, in his sphere, was deeply intent on folly. Ten righteous men could not be found in the city. The glutton was in it—the merchant, the planter, the builder—but in all its confines ten upright souls could not be found, "who feared God and eschewed evil." The salt had lost its savor, the light had gone out under a bushel. Houses of abomination were there, but no sanctuary for Jehovah. The inebriate shouted and carolled, but the song of praise was

silent. The fornicator and adulterer went forth on their dark work of lust and death, but the law had no one to vindicate its sanctions. The wickedness of Sodom was great, and the cry of its iniquity ascended to God.

But even in this vile city there was one righteous person; and he is not forgotten when destruction impends. For God does not forget His people. Every name, however humble, and wherever abiding, is engraven on His hands. In the evening before the destruction of Sodom, messengers from the Lord enter the city, and take up their abode in Lot's house. "And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife and thy two daughters which are here, lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city. And it came to pass when they had brought them forth that he said, Escape for thy life, look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain, escape thou to the mountains, lest thou be consumed." Lot made haste to obey, and thereby saved his life, but

his wife "looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt."

What a terrible retribution! In the destruction of Lot's wife, does not judgment alone appear to be the habitation of God's throne? But alas! the decisions of the creature are selfish and sinful. No finite mind in this probationary world, however elevated, can clearly calculate the influence of the minutest disobedience in that government of God, whose circuit is immeasurable. For let it be conceived that from the beginning, every creature of Jehovah, in all places of His dominion, had rendered a cordial and consistent allegiance; but let it be supposed still farther that, in an hour when holy myriads were engaged in blissful worship, that some revolting spirit should have insulted Heaven's King, by disregard of authority, and rebellion against law; what amazement and indignation would have started to life in the heart of those millions who were loyal and true! Nor can it be difficult to conjecture the doom of the culprit, even if a creature himself were allowed to decide.

"Cut him down," cut him down, would be the unanimous sentence of the concourse before the throne! Nor can the transgressor of the present day palliate his guilt by reference to ever-recurring offences. Sin is an evil thing and a bitter, wherever it exists, and the very smallest iniquity cannot be measured by man, in the range of its influence, and its fitness for mischief.

There is consistency in every providential arrangement, if we only had the wisdom to see, and the foresight to weigh. "But high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are the ways of the Eternal above our ways, and His thoughts above our thoughts." Lot's wife contemned God, and she perished. The command was express, Escape to the mountains, and look not behind thee. He that willfully offends in the least, will offend also in much. Behold what favors had been conferred upon this household! When the whole land lay before them the choice was theirs; when strong enemies rose up and made war, God provided an ally, who came to the rescue;

and now, when so many thousands in Sodom are doomed to destruction, this family alone are to be the vessels of mercy. Two angels not only came to Sodom at evening, and entered Lot's dwelling, but, when the morning arose, they took hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters, and brought them forth, and set them without the city. Under circumstances such as these how inexcusable and criminal was the disobedience of Lot's wife! For this look developed a preference for Sodom, with all its pollutions and idolatry. And even if it were the gaze of excited curiosity, the excuse was so trivial as to enhance, rather than palliate, her guilt. The command was divine and imperative, *Look not behind thee.* There is a point where the forbearance of Jehovah comes to an end. If that boundary line be crossed, compassion is exhausted, and the blow of retribution descends. The doom of Lot's wife was just, for the Judge of all the earth does right.

But when we condemn this woman, do we

not also pass judgment on ourselves? She perished because her heart clung to a city of wickedness; and are we to escape who cleave pertinaciously to a world, whose imaginations and thoughts are evil continually? When Sodom was consumed, what enormity of earth perished beneath its ashes? Did crime ever exist in more diversified forms than at present? Does not creation groan under sin? And is it not written that the "Son of God will be shortly revealed from Heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance upon them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power?" But what do the busy multitude care for such a saying? Let us eat, drink, and be merry! Who is the Lord, that we should obey Him? Again and again have the messengers pleaded, but their entreaties fall upon the dull, cold ear of sin like the mutterings of a dreamer! No impending doom can arrest the devotee in his downward career.

God is defied. Is it a young man? To some extent his position can be imagined and his temptations described. The world's promises are large, and its syren sings to him of pleasures untasted: Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk thou in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes. Enter the halls of mirth, quaff the ruddy wine, whirl wildly in the mazy dance, forget God, and let the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life intoxicate thy soul. Alas! it is all too plain. Giddy scenes and enticing voices and the hand of scornful expostulation are an overmatch for the hesitating and unstable spirit. Remonstrance is in vain. Conscience grows feebler and feebler amid the sinful roll of this world's merriment. The syren sings on bewitchingly, "Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning!" "With her much fair speech, she causeth him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forceth him. He goeth after her straightway as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to

the correction of the stocks, and knoweth not that it is for his life." Oh! could the voice of true friendship but reach this simple one, it would cry: Escape for thy life, flee to the mountain for safety, look not behind thee, remember Lot's wife.

It may be a middle-aged person, who has rapidly hoarded up mammon, and whose plans for future aggrandizement are all well adjusted. The soul, buoyed by past successes, thirsts for larger gains. The affections are riveted to the world. How can he give it up! But the messenger comes, and the avenger is near, and the command is imperative: Escape for thy life.

Perhaps the person addressed is a man of ambition and place. The aspiring soul has combined every influence to this end. Intellect, friendship, money, power, all have been taxed. The goal at last is reached. The appeal comes to this man just as he grasps the glittering and long sought for prize. Will he pause, even for a moment, to balance the evidence? In his heart there is no relish, at this

time, for such thoughts. Earthly honor, just gained, is too fascinating. Though the clouds are impending he must be excused for to-day.

The summons may come to some luxurious Dives, who thinks within himself, "What shall I do because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he says, this will I do, I will pull down my barns and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods." How alluring and deceptive are luxury and ease! What a bewildering spell can the riches of earth impose upon the spirit! How hardly shall they who live in palaces of wealth think of that far off country, which must be approached through the grave! This man of the world counts up his treasures, and revels in pleasure, while every reminder of death is carefully banished from view. He say, "Come ye, and I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant."

Finally, it may be an old man, whose pilgrimage of earth is nearly at an end. And is

it not strange that the decrepit and old cling pertinaciously to life and its follies? Youth is allured by promise, and young days are full of strength and hope, but to the aged the day has come when "the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men bow themselves, and the grinders cease, because they are few, and they that look out of the windows are darkened, when the dust is returning to the earth as it was, and the spirit unto the God who gave it." The old man treads almost alone the familiar and once crowded paths of boyhood. Friend after friend has departed. The generations around him are new and strange. And yet, trembling and feeble, the godless old man still cleaves to the world.

Is the picture overdrawn? Have not mankind, of every class, been told, and told often, that God is angry with the wicked every day? Does not conscience respond to revelation in its anticipations of that divine wrath which shall surely overtake the nations? In what hour shall that dread vengeance appear? Who can insure his own existence or that of the

world for a solitary day? Upon one fleeting moment of time eternal issues may depend. At best, every individual holds a title to earthly existence by a tenure so brittle that a breath of disease or the slightest casualty can break and destroy. The brevity of life is proverbial. We all do fade as the leaf. We pass our days as a tale that is told. In the midst of life we are in death. And yet these facts do not move us. Eternity may be near, but the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. The solemn and awful admonitions of holy writ, mingling with the majestic voices of nature, fall all unheeded upon the callous ear. The young maiden is as eager after admiration as though darkness and the worm did not wait for her in the grave! The man of commerce thinks only of gain, as though immortality could be purchased with a price. "He walks in a vain show, and is disquieted in vain, heaping up riches and knowing not who shall gather them."

Nor are we ever to forget that no man liveth to himself. Lot was commanded to save him-

self and house. For said the angel unto him, Hast thou any here besides?—son-in-law, and thy sons and daughters and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place. And nothing can be more distinctly unfolded or sacredly enjoined than the responsibilities and duties of the creature in his relations to others. The parent especially is to watch for the souls of his children as those who must give account. And to the faithful how inspiriting the promise, Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it. There is a divinely appointed connection between nurture and habit, between the blessing of God and parental education. And it is here, as elsewhere, whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap. The mind is a field upon which good or evil seed can be sown; or, if left altogether uncultured, will yield a harvest of briars, thorns, and noxious weeds. To cultivate rightly, demands labor and self-denial. But wo to the parent who neglects the opportunity, and pleads as an excuse "the cares of other things." For if

the youthful soul is allowed to germinate and take root, independent of truth, and in disregard of the sanctuary, then the Lord of Hosts vindicates His honor, and sends the curse of Eli on that house. First impressions originate in the family, and human character, together with all the issues of subsequent life, are modified to an extent not easily overestimated by those lessons and examples which are furnished at home. For it is there that the susceptible mind imbibes opinions and sentiments which are profound and enduring. "A wicked son is a grief to his father and a heaviness to his mother;" but how often can we trace the waywardness and criminality of manhood to those follies and excesses which were allowed in the household. Parental responsibility is vast. To the keeping and training of father and mother has been committed the new-born, tender, inexperienced but immortal spirit. And if this perishes, what answer can be given? Shall it be, "While thy servant was busy here and there it was gone?" Then may the reply be, "If by any means he be missing, then shall thy life be for his life."

Achan, the son of Zerah, committed a trespass in the accursed thing, and wrath fell on all the congregation of Israel, and "that man perished not alone in his iniquity." No man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself, but every living being is a steward for God.

God was just in the destruction of Lot's wife; but how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation. She looked back upon the city of Sodom, but our eyes are riveted upon a world of sin. Lot's wife disbelieved God, and thirsted for abominations; but is not the heart of the present generation fully set in it to do evil? Privilege increases responsibility. Lot's wife lived in a time of much dimness and obscurity; we live in a day when life and immortality have been brought to light in the gospel. When the fires of wrath descended on Sodom, the minds of the people were bewildered by superstition; there was but one man in the city who worshiped the true God. But the ages that now are have a sure word of prophesy. We acknowledge a divinity whose attributes are so revealed that none, not

even the wayfaring man, though a fool, need err therein. Our God is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.

Moreover, the case of Lot's wife was somewhat peculiar. For the message which came to this woman was sudden and unexpected, and there remained but a brief period for deliberate consideration. Around her, too, were acquaintances and friends and a home which she loved; before her was the mountain, a wilderness and comparative solitude. But still, as it seems, maternal affection, if no higher motive, should have quickened her pace, and insured outward obedience at least to the requirement of God. For her daughters were at her side, and now more than ever needed a mother's presence and care; while the safety of the household was indissolubly connected with that command of Jehovah to "escape to the mountain." In circumstances like these to look back upon Sodom was an act of rashness and criminality truly astounding. For if under cares and bitter disappointment the soul can

sometimes weary of existence, yet even then solicitude for one's offspring awakens desire to live. Corrupt and hardened indeed must be the heart that does not feel sympathy and compassion for its "own flesh and blood." Besides this, parental obligation imposes responsibilities and duties which none but the foolish and wicked ever refuse to acknowledge; and if those instincts of nature which are sanctioned and encouraged by revelation are cruelly disregarded and inhumanly suppressed, it can be no matter of surprise that retribution is inflicted. For the safety of loved ones may depend on dispatch, and procrastination of a moment often ends in despair. Example is powerful. They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars forever and ever. On the other hand, one sinner destroys much good. For no man perishes alone in his iniquity. Every opinion entertained, every word that is uttered, and every action performed, exerts an influence on the individual and society that is definite and abiding. Lot's

wife, however, had she remained in Sodom, or returned to it, could not have rescued a solitary inhabitant. But our relations to neighbors is different. For we are commanded to sow beside all waters. When Lot's wife was escaped from the city, the day of opportunities in Sodom had gone. All that remained was proffered salvation for herself. The believer, on the contrary, can live in the world and yet not be of it, can exist joyfully amid its sorrows, while he points the guilty and condemned to a mountain of refuge.

The doom of Sodom was terrific. Let the reader think of it for a moment. Lot has escaped. In an instant, as we may suppose, a cloud of unusual blackness is seen to gather. Hither and thither through its dark bosom shoots the forked lightning. The earth to its very centre shakes as peal after peal of deep-toned, angry thunder crashes on the ear. The inhabitants of those cities are mute and pale. The very birds and beasts, terrified, haste to flee. No vulgar song is heard, no voice of merriment, no shout of debauchery. For the

air, mingled with brimstone, stifles the breath, and the very blood tingles with fear. Wildly raves the storm, and soul after soul, singly or in groups, goes down to death in the wine-press of the wrath of God! But what is this to that great day of the Lord, when the heavens shall pass with a great noise, and the elements melt with fervent heat? That day too will come as a thief. No omen in earth or sky shall forecast the dread event. On the day preceding, the sun may rise as brightly, the stars beam forth as beautifully, and the whole creation move on as gloriously as though it were the world's first morning. But as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it also be in the day of the Son of Man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, and were given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot, they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed

them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. The merchant may be at his desk, the farmer at his plough, the scholar at his books, the vain damsel at her mirror, and the gay cavalier at his work of insolence and lust; but when the hand on the great dial-plate of time reaches its appointed bound, then will the angel stand upon the sea and upon the land, and swear by Him that liveth forever and ever that time shall be no longer. The whole world will be amazed, and multitudes confounded. There shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken and the other shall be left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken and the other left. Two men shall be in the field, the one shall be taken and the other left.

"The day of wrath, that dreadful day
When heaven and earth shall pass away,
What power shall be the sinner's stay?
How shall he meet that dreadful day?

When shriv'ling like a parched scroll,
The flaming heavens together roll;
When louder yet and yet more dread
Swells the high trump that wakes the dead.

Oh! on that day, that wrathful day,
When man to judgment wakes from clay,
Be THOU the trembling sinner's stay,
Though heaven and earth should pass away."

The lesson of "Lot's wife" is unceasing vigilance, resolute resistance to temptation, and unconditional obedience to God. For there are golden opportunities in the history of all, and upon the improvement of these moments hinges the soul's eternal destiny. But no feeble, hesitating effort will suffice. Lot's wife began to flee, but she lingered, looked back and perished. The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. None are crowned except those who strive. The foolish virgins were expectant attendants on the Bridegroom. Lamps they had, but no oil was provided; a name to live, but deadness of heart. And if the church of the present day were sifted, are there five out of ten who sanctify the Lord God in their hearts, and that are ready always to give an answer to every one that asketh, a reason of the hope that is in them, with meekness and fear. How many in

the earthly sanctuaries of to-day would blanch with fear were the summons to sound, The Bridegroom cometh; go ye forth to meet him! They have eaten and drunk in God's house, but the world holds their affections. The day hastens to its close. Of this we have unmistakable omens. And as the evening approaches, no human power can bring back the shadows which are gone down on the dial. A few fleeting years or months or hours, and life's struggle is over. A little while and the thrones of judgment shall be set. Reader, what will it avail us then that we have "made us gardens and orchards, and planted trees in them of all kinds of fruits; that we made ourselves pools of water to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees; that we got ourselves servants and maidens, also, great possessions of great and small cattle; that we gathered also silver and gold and the peculiar treasures of king's; that whatsoever our eyes desired we kept not from them;" at the bar of God how insignificant and valueless will appear the gains and honors of earth in comparison with

a soul whose destiny is—doom! And all this may become a reality so soon. For even while we write, death is busy at the vitals of thousands, and there is no discharge in this war. Behold, I come as a thief.

CHAPTER XVII.

LEAVING THE WILDERNESS.

"COME thou with us."—NUM. x. 29.

THERE is a crisis in the history of man, when the service of earth and the issues of a far-distant future come up for review and final adjudication. Up to this moment, the soul may have been thoughtless and comparatively indifferent. But now there are voices of solemn and definite import, which cannot be drowned, even amid the din and confusion of a turbulent world. Whence am I? What is my business here? What destination awaits me when the scenes of this existence are past? Is there a Being in the universe to whom allegiance is due, and whose authority is supreme? Does the soul perish in the grave, or has it an existence hereafter? And if man be immor-

tal, then what relation does the conduct of the life that now is bear to the judgments and awards of that life which is to come? These are questions of infinite concern. In this hour of profound thought and awful interrogation, the business of the world loses much of its attraction; and until a decision is made, gloom, sorrow and dread hang harassingly on the spirit. And well may the soul tremble, for life and death are suspended in the balance.

The day was very solemn when Moses spake unto his father-in-law and said, "Come thou with us." For a whole year the tribes had encamped in this barren wilderness. But the cloud at last begins to ascend. The tabernacle was taken down, and the sons of Gershon and the sons of Merari set forward to bear it. In the front place went the standard of the camp of the children of Judah, earnest of the sceptre of that Captain who, in after ages, should lift up His ensign in the face of all the nations. In the rearward of their camps, throughout the hosts, was the standard of Dan. The line of march is now complete, the tribes are in

readiness, banners wave, and in a moment more the multitude will depart. Farewell to Sinai, the mountain that burned with fire, where were fears and quakings; where a thick cloud was visible when the voice of thunderings was heard, when the Lord came down in sight of all the people. It was just at this moment that Moses spake unto Hobab. The invitation is cordial and urgent. Leave the land of Midian, with its ignorance, superstition and moral death, and come with us, for we are journeying to a better country. Though the path lead through a wilderness, fear not to follow. There are provisions for the way till the promised land is reached. That pillar of cloud and of fire shall guide. No enemy that rises up against us can prosper, for the Lord our God which goeth before us He shall fight for us. And the wilderness once passed, the inheritance beyond the river is sure. And it is a blessed portion; for there is Lebanon with its cedars, Hermon with its dews, Eschol with its clusters, while there are glorious hills and well-watered valleys flowing

with milk and honey. It is a land of promise, and Jehovah shall set His name there. Kings are to reign and prophets to speak, while beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth shall be Mount Zion. In the holy place between the cherubim will dwell the Shechinah, and by and by, in the fullness of time, One shall sit upon the throne who is Lord of the whole earth. What are the treasures of Midian in comparison with these? And now how will Hobab decide? Which land, Midian or Canaan, shall be the inheritance of his children through countless generations. The question is vital, the decision is paramount.

But in this invitation of Moses to Hobab there is a solemn lesson for us. Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. In this wayfaring world the old serpent has left his trail on us all. What a desolate wilderness is here! Buried cities, suffering humanity, bleaching bones, and man born to sorrow as the sparks fly upward. What trial, what disappointment, what wretchedness meets us at every turn! Who would choose

his portion in a land where storm after storm arises darkly, and the lightnings of God's wrath shall presently descend? Who would abide here when another country is provided and the way to it is so plain? Then come with us. There is provision for the journey. What is thy burden? Is it suffering and care? There is an angel in the cloudy pillar who bears our sorrows and carries our griefs. Is it the gloom of the grave? There is one in our midst that is able to deliver those who, through fear of death, are all their lifetime subject to bondage! Is it guilt that oppresses? We have such an High Priest who is set on the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens, a minister of the sanctuary and true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man, who once in the end of the world appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. The king of terrors, therefore, is conquered, his sting has been extracted, while our great Leader, with His own blood, blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against His people, and

took it out of the way, nailing it to His Cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Then come with us; for where these "Tribes" go, God goes; and where they are not, the garden of the Lord is turned into a wilderness. Is it a country that you seek? Then come with us; for we are journeying unto a place concerning which the Lord God has said I will give it you. In that blesed land there is no more curse; for on the fair fields of Canaan grows the tree of life whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. There, too, are golden streets, and the crystal river, and that unnumbered multitude clothed in garments clean and white. There is that country where the throne of God and the Lamb is in the midst, and His servants serve Him and see His face, and His name is in their foreheads; and where there is no night, and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light; and they shall reign forever and ever. Reader, will *you* go?

"The voice of free grace cries, Escape to the mountain,
For Adam's lost race Christ hath opened a fountain;
For sin and transgression and every pollution,
His blood flows most freely in streams of salvation
Hallelujah to the Lamb who has purchased our pardon,
We will praise Him again when we pass over Jordan."